

A PILOT PROJECT TO ENGAGE THE EAST ATHENS COMMUNITY IN
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to develop a systemic approach to increasing the wealth of low income areas that suffer from socio-economic problems by engaging the community in economic development.

A review of the precedent literature demonstrated that few understand the complexity of poverty. The linear thinking exemplified in the various models substantiated the simplistic and singularly focused solutions commonly proposed.

The theological basis of the project posits that the Church – a body of believers that thinks and acts holistically through a systemic approach, ministering to the spirit, soul, and body – provides the solution since overcoming poverty is a spiritual issue.

The hexagon technique was used to systemically analyze the issue of increasing the wealth in the East Athens community. Two major obstacles to increasing the wealth are counter-productivity thinking and the short-term investing strategy that is present.

In order to have a lasting effect on the elimination of persistent poverty two conditions must be met. First the community needs to be involved in the process. Second the local body of believers has to become more involved than just meeting physical needs. It must exercise its roles as the moral compass of society, an advocate for the poor and the prophetic voice of God.

PART I: CLARIFICATION

INTRODUCTION

Introductory Topic Title

The title of this Thesis-Project is A Pilot Project to Engage the East Athens Community in Economic Development.

The Purpose of this Thesis-Project

My hypothesis is that a systemic approach to engaging the community in economic development will create measurable and lasting impact on the wealth of the community. Whether it be federal, state, or local government or other organizations (primarily non-profit), anti-poverty solutions have tended to be implemented without much cooperation from other affected segments such as the business, health, educational, and faith entities in the community. Therefore the purpose of this project is to develop a systemic approach to increasing the wealth of low income areas that suffer from socio-economic problems by engaging the whole community in economic development. Particular attention will be given to identifying the role the Church is to play in this process.

The Research Questions

The guiding question in this endeavor is, “How is the wealth of the East Athens community created and expanded?” By examining this question from a systemic view, factors that contribute to the expansion, barriers that inhibit it and the interaction between them will be identified. Based on these findings, the project will be able to propose actions that will have the greatest effect in creating and expanding the wealth of the community.

In pursuit of the answer to this inquiry, additional questions will be answered. The first deals with clarifying the issue, “Why is creating wealth so significant to the East Athens community?” The next two questions address what should be done to overcome poverty: “What does the existing literature say and what models are currently being used to overcome poverty?” and, “What is the biblical/theological basis that frames the project?” The final questions are a reflection on the process: “How effective were the methods used?” and “What are the outcomes in terms of results, next steps and transferability?”

The Assumptions

There are several key assumptions that I am making. The first is that the root cause of these socio-economic problems is sin. Therefore in order for lasting change as opposed to temporary behavior modification to occur, they must be addressed from a spiritual perspective. Thus the Church must be involved.

The second assumption is that the East Athens community and Athens-Clarke County have a sufficient level of interest to participate and pursue the paths to increased wealth.

The final assumption is that economic development is the key starting point for increasing the overall *shalom* of the community.

Parameters of the Project

The main area of concentration will be that part of the county identified as East Athens and more specifically, Census Tracts 301 and 302, which have been designated as low income. However, because of the nature and scope of the issue the community county-wide will be involved.

Limitations of the Study

This study is designed as the first step in breaking the cycle of persistent poverty in the target area. The process of engaging a community in economic development will require a significant amount of time. As such, it will require further study and follow-up to determine the success of economic development as the entry point to affect other socio-economic problems of the community.

Definition of Terms

City is “where relations are *gesellschaft* (large-scale “societal” or formal role relationships) rather than *gemeinschaft* (more intimate-scale ‘community’ or primary relationships) and forms of social organization are organic rather than mechanical.”¹

¹ J. John Palen, *The Urban World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 7.

Economic development is the process of enhancing the factors of productive capacity that result in a sustainable increase in living standards as measured by per capita income and unemployment rate.

Faith-Based community economic development is defined as the involvement of faith-based institutions in projects designed to revitalize their communities, establish sustainable economic development initiatives, attract investments, build wealth, and encourage entrepreneurship.²

Hexagoning is a group visual thinking technique that captures ideas related to a central issue. It then illustrates the structural and causal relationships between these system variables in causal loop diagrams.

Mental models are a conscious or subconscious mental understanding that tells us how to take action.³

Shalom is “a state of wholeness and completeness possessed by a person or a group that includes good health, prosperity, security, justice, and deep spiritual contentment.”⁴

Systems thinking is a conceptual “framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots.’”⁵

² T. David Reese and Christina A. Clamp, "Faith-based Community Economic Development: Principles & Practices," *Federal Reserve Bank Of Boston, Public And Community Affairs Department*, <http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/faith/ced.pdf>. (accessed September 15, 2006).

³ Doug Hall, "A Model for Faith-based Initiatives" (Boston: Emmanuel Gospel Center, , photocopied), 4.

⁴ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 86.

⁵ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 68.

Transformational development refers to “seeking positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially, and spiritually.”⁶

The Methodology

Clarification

In order to put the project in proper perspective a brief review of the demographics will be provided. In the city where I reside, Athens, GA, the public high school graduation rate hovers around fifty percent. The poverty rate is 28.3 percent, and of all counties in the United States with populations greater than 100,000, it ranks as the fifth worse. Additionally, of those living below the poverty level, sixty-five percent are classified as the “working poor.” Also one out of every four children in Athens-Clarke County lives in poverty.

Conceptualization

Literature Review

The literature review will concentrate on four areas: the basis for the methodology of the project, the spiritual dynamics of economic development, existing economic development models and secular contributions.

Two books that Robert Linthicum has written, *City of God City of Satan* and *Empowering the Poor*, offer great insights into the role of the Church in the city and the role of community organizing in empowering the poor. In *Just Generosity* Ronald J.

⁶ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 3.

Sider presents a comprehensive strategy for overcoming poverty. Bryant L. Myers in his book, *Walking with the Poor*, presents transformational development which includes material, social and spiritual change as a way of addressing poverty.

Several models will be reviewed. One is the community development model fathered by John Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association, and exemplified in the work of the Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church in Jamaica, Queens led by Rev. Floyd Flake and the Metro Economic Development Corporation established by T.D. Jakes.

Although a review of secular literature may seem a bit odd, it is important for at least two reasons. The first is that since this literature is coming with a different worldview, there may be insights to solutions or approaches that prevailing Christian thought may miss. The second reason is that the review may show some inherent deficiencies in a non-Christian approach to poverty. A review of Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* will begin this part. It also includes *Chaos or Community?* by Holly Sklar, *Ending Poverty as We Know It* by William P. Quigley, and *Rebuilding America* by J. Kenneth Blackwell and Jerome R. Corsi. This thesis-project will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by showing the benefits of looking at poverty from a systemic approach both in terms of factors involved and the interaction of the stakeholders in a community at large.

The Theological Framework

The theological framework for the project will then be developed, based on three principles. First, it will develop a general theology of the city that is based on the

relationship of the Church to the city, the purpose of the Church in the city and an understanding of the spiritual realm as it relates to the city.

The second principle that will be pursued hones in on the confrontation of the church and poverty. This will examine the nature of the problem itself including what poverty is and what the causes of poverty are. The obligation of the Church in addressing poverty will then be established.

Lastly, the theological basis for how the Church carries out this mandate will be described. The underlying premise is that economic activity should be modeled after the way God runs His creation. In this regard answers to the practical issues of life such as, “How do I provide for me and my family?” and, how can the system I live in provide security, justice and economic opportunity?” - questions essentially involved with economics - are promulgated throughout the Old and New Testament. As economic development takes place according to biblical principles, those participating in it will grow according to God’s promises both in quality of life and spiritual maturity.

Confrontation

Project Design

The primary methodology used to assist in understanding the scope and nuances of the system is hexagoning. The initial step in addressing the problem was to formulate two questions. The first was “How can the community encourage economic development?” The second was, “What are the barriers to economic development?” To answer these questions two different groups were identified.

The first group to address these questions was the East Athens Development Corporation (EADC) board and staff of which I am a board member and Chairman of the Economic Development Subcommittee. EADC was incorporated in 1993 as a 501(c)3 nonprofit Community Based Development Organization (CBDO) and Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) designated to carry out community economic development, affordable housing, and neighborhood revitalization programs primarily in East Athens defined by Census Tracts 301 and 302. The board and staff offered an opportunity to get the community involved. At least 51% of the board membership must be residents of the target area. The staff is actively involved in the area and therefore very knowledgeable of the community.

In forming the second group an attempt was made to include the wider Athens-Clarke County community. Representatives from faith-based organizations, local businesses, county and state government, the University of Georgia as well as other interested parties were invited.

The responses from the both meetings were then collated. The process of grouping the variables into categories and determining causal relationships followed. Critical next steps were identified for creating wealth in the East Athens community particularly from the standpoint of eliminating the barriers.

Outcomes

Based on the results of this project an evaluation of both the form and the substance will be made. The project methodology will be examined in terms of its effectiveness in answering the key issue of addressing poverty at a community level. Also an evaluation of the learning team will be made.

It is anticipated that additional areas of research will be identified. These would include a study to determine the transferability of the findings to other similar cities as well as to other locations throughout the world. Perhaps even more important would be to assess the role of economic development as the entry point to mitigating the wider socio-economic conditions in the community.

CHAPTER ONE

PERSISTENT POVERTY IN THE EAST ATHENS COMMUNITY

Charles Dickens begins *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way...⁷

So it is in the city where I reside, Athens, GA. Unfortunately a similar description could be used in assessing most metropolitan areas, with the inner cities bearing the brunt of the negative extremes. They are plagued with comprehensive socio-economic problems. High unemployment rates, high crime rates, many living at or below poverty level, high secondary school dropout rates, low literacy rates, high rates of teenage pregnancies and unwed mothers characterize these areas. Further there have been attempts to address each of these areas, always heretofore unsuccessfully.

A brief review of demographics will be helpful. Athens, GA is a city in Clarke County governed by a unified government – city and county merged together. It is also the home of the University of Georgia. As a city of 100,000 not including non-resident

⁷ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Knowledge Matters Ltd.
<http://www.literature.org/authors/dickens-charles/two-cities/book-01/chapter-01.html>. (accessed August 29, 2006).

students, it represents a culturally diverse population – 26.6% African-American, 7.5% Hispanic, 59% Caucasian and 7.9% Other.⁸

Statistics in three areas – crime, economics and education - provide quantitative evidence of the persistent poverty that exists in Athens-Clarke County (ACC). The index crime rate per 100,000 is 6,836 compared to the average Georgia county of 2,779. The percent of juvenile arrests for index crimes is 28.9 versus 18.3 for the average Georgia county.⁹

The poverty rate for the county is 28.3 percent, which is the eighth highest rate in Georgia and more than double the state's rate of thirteen percent. Out of counties in the United States with a population greater than 100,000 Athens-Clarke County is the fifth poorest. Per capita income for the county is more than four thousand dollars less than the state average. The median household income is sixty-eight percent of the national median and sixty-seven percent of the state median.¹⁰

Equally revealing is the disparity between those earning less than ten thousand dollars and those earning more than \$100,000.¹¹ The county exceeds the average Georgia county on both accounts. The unemployment rate conversely of 3.4 percent is less than

⁸ Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development, UGA, *2004 Georgia County Guide* (Athens, 2004), 1, <http://www.georgiastats.uga.edu/counties/059.pdf>. (accessed August 29, 2006).

⁹ Ibid., 1.

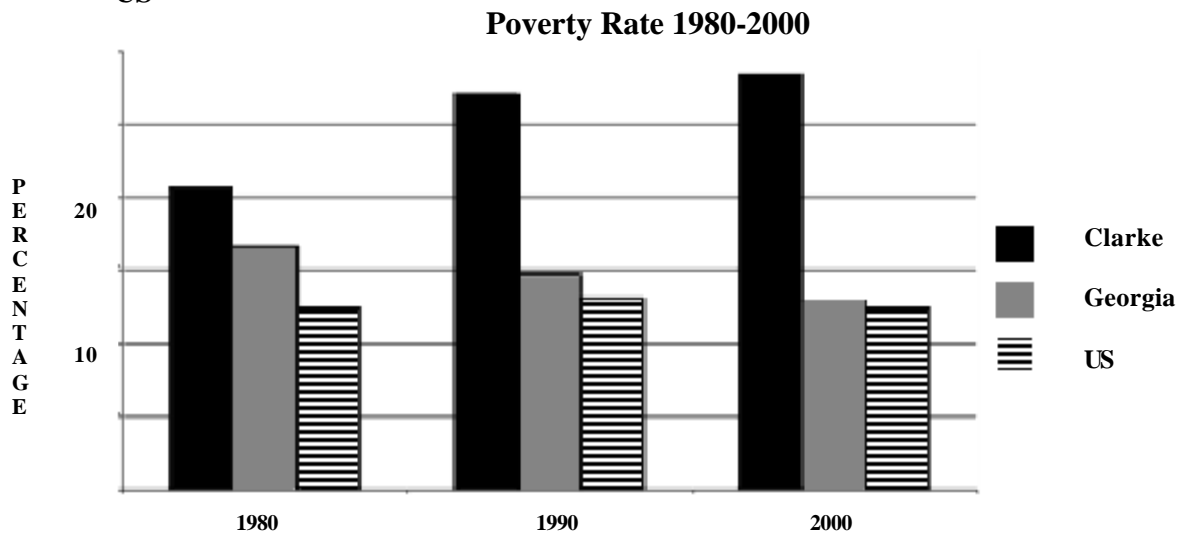
¹⁰ University of Georgia's Initiative on Poverty and the Economy, *Poverty & The Economy: A Profile of Athens-Clarke County* (Athens, 2006), 1,2, http://www.prosperousathens.org/meetingsevents/060327/A_Profile_of_Athens.pdf (accessed August 29, 2006).

¹¹ Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development, UGA, *2004 Georgia County Guide* (Athens, 2004), 1, <http://www.georgiastats.uga.edu/counties/059.pdf>. (accessed August 29, 2006).

the state average of 4.6 and less than the national average of 5.5 percent.¹² An analysis of this apparent contradiction of a high poverty level and yet low unemployment will follow later.

Although these statistics are for the year 2004, the trend remains the same. The graph below shows the increase in poverty for the period 1980 – 2000 for Athens-Clarke County, Georgia and the United States.¹³

Table 1. Title: Poverty Rate Percentage for Clarke County, Georgia and US



As can be seen, the poverty rate for ACC has increased over the last two decades while the rates for Georgia and the US have decreased or stayed the same. At this time there is no statistical valid explanation.

¹² University of Georgia's Initiative on Poverty and the Economy, *Poverty & The Economy: A Profile of Athens-Clarke County* (Athens, 2006), 2, http://www.prosperousathens.org/meetingsevents/060327/A_Profile_of_Athens.pdf (accessed August 29, 2006).

¹³ *Partners For A Prosperous Athens*, 2006, "Athens-Clarke County: Overtime," <http://www.prosperousathens.org/poverty/index.html#prate/> (accessed August 29, 2006).

Using a variety of factors Athens-Clarke County lags behind the state in terms of education as well. The public school system in the county has a higher number of economically disadvantaged students by over eight percent and a lower class completion rate by over seven percent. On the other hand, the percent of the population that has a bachelor's degree is double the state county average and for those that have at least a graduate degree the percent is over three times greater.¹⁴

For several reasons a particular geographic area of the city identified by Census Tracts 301 and 302 and known as East Athens, will be the focus of this project. First this is a clearly defined area with some available statistical data with which to track the project. Three such indicators are the median household income, families living below the poverty level, and owner occupied housing units. For East Athens, the median household income is \$18,512 compared to \$29,996 for the county. Thirty-seven percent of the families in East Athens live below the poverty level compared to roughly fifteen percent in the county as a whole. For owner occupied housing units the percentage is thirty-four percent for East Athens compared to forty-two percent for Clarke County.

Second, the characteristics of an economically disadvantaged area as well as social problems such as low literacy rates, high rates of teenage pregnancy, and rampant drug addiction are well represented. Third, because I have developed relationships with key leaders in that community including businessmen and pastors, it is anticipated that I will have a higher degree of cooperation.

¹⁴ Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development, UGA, *2004 Georgia County Guide* (Athens, 2004), 1,2, <http://www.georgiastats.uga.edu/counties/059.pdf> (accessed August 29, 2006).

In conclusion, ACC in general and East Athens more specifically is in desperate need of addressing the problem of persistent poverty. As seen in the preceding data, ACC is a county of extremes. It is the home of the state's flagship institution of higher learning, the University of Georgia, and yet nineteen percent of the adult population has not completed high school. Athens-Clarke County poverty rate is 28.3 percent, the eighth highest in the state of Georgia, yet the unemployment rate is better than the state and national averages

An analysis of the data gives rise to a multiplicity of questions. The first of which perhaps seeks an explanation of why poverty in this county is as bad as it is, and yet unemployment is lower. Several reasons could be offered, in no particular order. There has been an influx of those from the surrounding rural counties of northeast Georgia seeking better opportunities. The well developed social agency network and the public transportation system, although limited, provide a measure of support for those seeking entry level positions, and thus encourages the unemployed to relocate to ACC and take jobs at the low end of the wage scale.

Another contributing factor is the abundant supply of a part time workforce in the form of the 30,000 plus University of Georgia students. They impact some of the statistics as well. For example, the poverty rate drops to 23.4 percent when the student influence is removed. The student population by occupying low-wage service and retail jobs depresses wages and increases the number of people employed.¹⁵

¹⁵ University of Georgia's Initiative on Poverty and the Economy, *Poverty & The Economy: A Profile of Athens-Clarke County* (Athens, 2006), 2, http://www.prosperousathens.org/meetingsevents/060327/A_Profile_of_Athens.pdf (accessed August 29, 2006).

The political climate, one that has been described as “benign neglect,” is another reason for the higher rate of poverty. A land use plan that has encouraged gentrification because of the restricted use of undeveloped green space has driven land prices up and concomitantly housing costs. In addition when opportunities to preserve low-income housing have arisen, there has been little effort made by the local government to intervene. Similarly, the mode of transportation for many of those living in poverty is public transportation. The Athens Transit System, although useful, is under-funded, “leading to a lack of service to many areas of the county, inconvenient timing and layout of routes and limited hours.”¹⁶

And finally, the faith community has been content to fulfill its obligation to those living in poverty by providing a cornucopia of social services primarily directed to meeting physical needs: meals and food pantries, clothes closets and temporary shelter for the homeless. However, the Church has been hesitant in its role as an advocate for the poor and for social justice. While throughout recent history Christians have been at the forefront of confronting the evils of society - William Wilberforce and slavery, Martin Luther King and racial discrimination, Desmond Tutu and apartheid, in the area of poverty the Church in Athens has been limited in its effort.

What then is the current status? In March 2006 the Mayor of Athens-Clarke consolidated government, the President of the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce, the Clarke County Superintendent of Education, the Director of the Family Connection Partnership and the Director of Community Relations for the University of Georgia came together to create a collaboration between all community interests and institutions

¹⁶ Partners for a Prosperous Athens, *Poverty in Athens: What We Have Learned* (Athens, 2006), 4.

interested in breaking the cycle of poverty called Partners for a Prosperous Athens. Its purpose is to work with citizens of the community to identify the most pressing problems and challenges and over time to develop collaborative strategies for addressing them. Given the response of the community, awareness of the persistent poverty that exists in Athens-Clarke County has certainly been heightened. It is yet to be seen how successful the effort will be in terms of lasting change.

Finally, what can be done? This odyssey started with the search for an answer, an answer to the question, “How do I as a Christian begin to address the myriad of socio-economic issues that are facing the Athens-Clark Country community?” Although I understood quite clearly the implications of the answer to the question: “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time,” I had no idea where to take the first bite. This project is an attempt to take that first bite – a bite that has something to say about the Church as a whole and about an individual seeking to fulfill God’s will in being an instrument of *shalom* in the city.

PART II: CONCEPTUALIZATION

CHAPTER TWO

A PRECEDENT LITERATURE REVIEW OF METHODOLOGY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MODELS

The precedent literature review will examine four areas - the basis for the methodology of the project, the spiritual dynamics of economic development, existing Christian economic development models, and secular contributions.

Peter Senge's, *The Fifth Discipline*, is an invaluable resource for approaching socio-economic issues of our day. Although he has written it with an organization in mind, the tools he provides are applicable in a much broader context. Each of the five new "component technologies," when taken as a whole, lend assistance in addressing varied and diverse situations. These five are Systems Thinking, Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Building Shared Vision, and Team Learning.¹⁷ Although all contribute to this project, special emphasis will be given to Systems Thinking.

Socio-economic problems have historically been approached in a rather linear fashion. In *Meeting of the Minds*, the author calls it the "silo problem."¹⁸ In the author's

¹⁷ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 6.

¹⁸ Vincent P. Barabba, *Meeting of the Minds* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard business School Press, 1995), 4.

example, departments in a company do not interact at the level where the work gets done but communication must go up the chain of command to the place of shared responsibility before going back down to where the issue is actually addressed.

Poverty's solutions have likewise been treated with the same "silo" approach. Responses have typically been by the various institutions - religious, government, non-profits - without much coordination. This lack of cooperation is true even within these institutions themselves. For example, within the federal government, different departments exist for Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Education, all of which impact the issue of poverty. There are some instances where cooperation is being sought. The *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* includes a provision to include faith-based initiatives as possible recipients of funding.

Senge opens his book:

From a very early age, we are taught to break apart problems, to fragment the world. This apparently makes complex tasks and subjects more manageable, but we pay a hidden, enormous price. We can no longer see the consequences of our actions; we lose our intrinsic sense of connection to a larger whole. When we then try too "see the big picture," we try to reassemble the fragments in our minds, to list and organize all the pieces. But, as physicist David Bohm says, the task is futile-similar to trying to reassemble the fragments of a broken mirror to see a true reflection. Thus, after a while we give up trying to see the whole together.

The tools and ideas presented in this book are for destroying the illusion that the world is created of separate, unrelated forces¹⁹

The socio-economic issues we face are overwhelming, when looked at in total, which lends some understanding as to why the non-integrated approach is used.

¹⁹ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 3.

The laws that Senge lists further reinforce the idea that without a systems approach we are doomed to languish with little progress in spite of the billions of dollars that have been spent on the War on Poverty. It can be seen in his first law, "Today's problems come from yesterday's solutions."²⁰ The prior government programs that were developed to assist those living in poverty through direct payments have created a generational cycle of poverty. Each of the eleven laws Senge identifies can be directly applied to the issue of poverty and the attempts to solve it through current methods. Law Eleven, "There is no blame," is also most poignant, as we see everyone affixing blame to either the government as the creator of the welfare state or to the individual for poor choices.²¹

An axiom of Senge's is that "every influence is both *cause* and *effect*." As he goes on to describe, his building blocks of systems thinking, reinforcing and balancing feedback, provide the basis for the methodology and analysis found in Chapter 4 of this project.²²

Then through these "causal loops" and concomitant systems thinking, we are able to identify points of leverage - places where small actions can produce long-lasting improvements.²³ Systems thinking then provides a way "to recognize increasingly (dynamically) complex and subtle structures... amid the wealth of details, pressures, and

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

²¹ Ibid., 67.

²² Ibid., 79.

²³ Ibid., 64.

cross currents."²⁴ As such it offers a "means of organizing complexity into a coherent story that illuminates the causes of problems and how they can be remedied in enduring ways."²⁵

The second area to be reviewed concerns the spiritual dynamics of economic development. This section begins with citing the works of Robert C. Linthicum. Of particular note, is Linthicum's discussion of evil and its individual and corporate nature as it relates to the city in his *City of God City of Satan*. As he correctly states, Evangelical Protestantism has concentrated on individual salvation - a stance that differs from the three major theologies of Christendom - Calvinism, Roman Catholicism, and Orthodoxy- which has included a "strong sense of both corporate and societal sin." Linthicum's position is that "Scripture presents salvation as both individual and corporate."²⁶

In the evangelical circles I have been exposed to, the personal salvation emphasis has been the preeminent position. But the insights that Linthicum offers stands in opposition to this rather limited one-sided answer. He says, "We cannot simply save individuals in the city and expect that the city will get saved. If the church does not deal with the systems and structures of evil in the city, then it will not effectively transform the lives of that city's individuals."²⁷

His description of the systems of a city - economic, political and religious and the corporate evil that emanates from them - is helpful as a comprehensive backdrop for

²⁴ Ibid., 126.

²⁵ Ibid., 128.

²⁶ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 45.

²⁷ Ibid., 46-47.

understanding the work of sin in the city. As he states, the systems can work for "justice and economic equality" but they can also enhance "the economic privilege of a few while exploiting the poor and powerless, using the political order to further such exploitation while maintaining a city's order, and turning faith commitment into formalized religion that legitimizes 'the powers that be' while benefiting from the powers' largess."²⁸

Linthicum expands his theology of the evil in the city to a level beyond just the systems of the city to include their connection with the "Evil One."²⁹ He asserts that the principalities and powers that St. Paul refers to in his epistles to the early Church are both "celestial and terrestrial at the same time"³⁰ and that the individual's and systems' capacity for evil is "directly related to their capacity to be possessed by the negative spirituality of principalities and powers."³¹ His admonition to understand the enemy and the parameters of the warfare are particularly challenging.

Thus to adequately address poverty, and as discussed in Chapter 1, persistent poverty, it is my conclusion that some systemic approach that deals with personal and corporate sin, and principalities and powers is needed. Therefore much of what has been tried before avoids at least one of these three levels. Evangelicals may deal with personal sin and principalities and powers. Others may deal with corporate or societal evil. But no effort in this city has included a three-prong understanding, much less attack.

²⁸ Ibid.,63.

²⁹ Ibid.,65.

³⁰ Ibid.,68.

³¹ Ibid.,72.

The other work of Linthicum contributing to this project is *Empowering the Poor*. In it he identifies a crucial truth in examining the spiritual dimension of the city and its ills. He points out, "If we do not appreciate the spiritual dimension of the struggle, then the oppressed, once overthrowing their oppressors, will inevitably become the new oppressors of a new victim people."³² This further underscores the fact that poverty is a spiritual problem.

Another key postulate is Linthicum's warning that outsiders cannot determine what is best for the community if they are going to be effective in empowering the poor. He writes, "A primary assumption of effective urban ministry is to recognize that the people who are best able to deal with a problem are the people most affected by that problem."³³ This was particularly relevant to me as I wrestled with defining the project. My initial question was "How do I engage the community in economic development?" Clearly Linthicum would say that I did not understand the nature of empowerment.

He explains the principle further: "The task of the church is to come alongside the poor, both becoming their advocates before the rich and to join with the poor in their struggle to deal with the forces that are exploiting their community."³⁴ Although he is speaking of the role of the church, it could be applicable to any outside party.

Linthicum delineates his model for empowering the poor through community organization - a five-step process. The steps are networking, coalition-building,

³² Robert C. Linthicum, *Empowering the Poor* (Monrovia: MARC, 2000), 19.

³³ Ibid., 22.

³⁴ Ibid., 29.

acting/reflecting/acting, leadership empowerment and the birth of community.³⁵

Although I have not elected to follow that model, it does provide additional understanding to the process of empowering the poor.

In explaining his model he presents "five normative presuppositions upon which everything else in both urban ministry and community organization rests."³⁶ They are:

1. "Only the poor of the city can assume responsibility for solving their own predicaments."³⁷

2. "The poor can be empowered only by acting collectively through reflection, projects, and actions."³⁸

3. "The body of Christ in a city can best carry out ministry to that city."³⁹

4. "The church can assume its local mission only through proclamation, ministry among and with the poor, and focusing that ministry in empowerment."⁴⁰

5. "The task of the para-church organization, denomination or mission group is to support the local body of Christ in whatever ways will more effectively enable the church to undertake ministries of empowerment with the poor."⁴¹

All these are valuable in forging a mental model of successful urban ministry.

However I disagree with one of his statements supporting his first presupposition. He

³⁵ Ibid.,25-26.

³⁶ Ibid.,37-41.

³⁷ Ibid., 37.

³⁸ Ibid., 38.

³⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁴¹ Ibid., 41.

states, "Because there is only a finite amount of wealth in any country, the powerful can monopolize a majority of it only by denying it to the poor."⁴² This statement assumes that the economy is a zero sum game - that the only way one can get more is by taking from someone else, i.e., one wins and one loses. If this were true, there would be no growth in Gross National Product (GNP). The multiplier effect and macroeconomics would be rendered invalid. The alternative, I would hope, would be that synergism would occur. And, partnering with the poor would increase absolute wealth rather than merely redistributing a fixed amount. The implication behind a "finite amount of wealth" is that of class warfare between those who have and those who have not. Notwithstanding this, the presuppositions provide useful guidelines for community organization.

In summary his arguments for the church's role in empowering the poor are weighty, as he writes, "The constant theme of Scripture-whether dealing with the liberation of the impoverished powerless or the salvation of the spiritually impoverished-is that of self-initiative, of empowerment through self-determination."⁴³

Ronald Sider's *Just Generosity*, also provides some valuable insights. His stated evangelical position reflects a more balanced view of overcoming poverty. The chapter on "A Comprehensive Strategy" was particularly enlightening. He bypasses the left/right, liberal/conservative issue by focusing on "a third crucial cause and solution: civil society." He defines civil society as including "all those institutions in which-to a

⁴² Ibid., 37-38.

⁴³ Ibid., 109.

greater or lesser degree-their members are personally aware of each other and interact with each other, thereby giving their members a meaningful sense of belonging."⁴⁴

He argues that a strong moral society has three benefits. The first is that "our primary moral teachers are located in civil society." The second is that these institutions of civil society "provide crucial help and support." And third, it can strengthen our resolve to empower the poor.⁴⁵

Sider further expands on this by proposing a multi-sector strategy that calls on each group to do what it does best. Under this umbrella he includes business, unions, the media, universities and government. In the locale that this project is centered, there is ample evidence to support this multi-sector approach as the better approach.

Bryant L. Myers presents several points in *Walking with the Poor*. The first involves the role of the Holy Spirit, which has been largely ignored in much of the literature. He makes two key statements in this regard. The first is that, "Any transformational development that is not guided, empowered, and made effective by the Holy Spirit will not prove sustainable." He then adds, "Expecting and praying for supernatural interventions by the Spirit must be part of the spirituality of Christian development workers." These are crucial aspects of the church's role in transforming all areas of the lives of individuals - body, soul and spirit.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 81.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁶ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 40.

Another aspect of his writing is his reminder that "The world tends to view the poor as a group that is helpless; thus we give ourselves permission to play god in the lives of the poor."⁴⁷ His point is that "the poor are people with names, people to whom God has given gifts, and people with whom and among whom God has been working before we even know they are there."⁴⁸ In short his admonition is to see those living in poverty as individuals, equally valued by God.

Myers' work also contributes to the issue of poverty in two other ways. The first addresses the question, "What is poverty?" and the second addresses "The Causes of Poverty."

In answering the first question, he initially tackles "Poverty as deficit." His point is that if poverty is just about lack, then "when the missing things are provided, the poor will no longer be poor."⁴⁹ As he points out, two negative consequences arise from this position where the "poor are seen as passive recipients, incomplete human beings we make complete and whole through our largess."⁵⁰ The first consequence is that they are devalued and seen as "defective and inadequate." The second is that whoever offers help, may see themselves as the savior, the ones who are delivering the poor from their state of lack.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁵¹ Ibid., 66.

Myers' presents the view of Jayakumar Christian's understanding of poverty as disempowerment. He writes that "The poor find themselves trapped inside a system of disempowerment" comprised of the interacting personal, biophysical, cultural, social and spiritual/religious systems.⁵² Further that these systems foster a "web of lies" that "drives poverty deep inside, making it very hard to confront and change."⁵³

Answering the second question Myers points out that the need to understand the causes of poverty is important in order to determine the appropriate response. And, as a corollary he writes that understanding the causes of poverty depends on where along a continuum of God's redemptive activity we start looking.⁵⁴ The continuum starts at the base level of needs and continues through issues, structures, groups and classes, and finally, ideologies and values. He emphasizes throughout that "people are the cause of poverty, and it is people who must change for things to change."⁵⁵

He attributes the causes of poverty to four areas - physical, social, mental, and spiritual.⁵⁶ For physical causes he cites the obvious categories of material poverty and physical weakness. In defining social causes he uses Christian's framework that social systems are the "tools and legitimating narratives of those who play god in the lives of the poor by creating the web of lies."⁵⁷

⁵² Ibid., 72.

⁵³ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 83-85.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 83.

In describing mental causes he expands on the lack of knowledge and technical information to include a "poverty of being" which he notes is the "reality for the web of lies that the poor believe."⁵⁸ In characterizing spiritual causes, he includes "principalities and powers and their active deception."⁵⁹

With this as a foundation Myers presents a "Holistic Understanding of Poverty." His first conclusion is that the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational - "a result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable."⁶⁰ It is focused on the concept of "the poor not knowing who they are or the reason for which they were created."⁶¹

His second conclusion is that the cause of poverty is fundamentally spiritual - that sin is what distorts these relationships. To me this is a fundamental concept that is totally ignored in the secular approaches to eliminating poverty and to a certain extent among clergy. But the implication is clear: to adequately deal with those living in poverty, the spiritual must be addressed.

The final contribution Myers makes to this thesis is his exploration of the Christian Witness in transformational development. Again, the practical aspects on the "how" of witnessing, in a developmental context, is rarely addressed. In his excellent treatise on the subject, Myers presents compelling arguments as to why we must witness - "The need to proclaim the good news of Christ is directly related to a Christian

⁵⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁶¹ Ibid., 87.

understanding of transformation,"⁶² "We need to bring the best that we have,"⁶³ and "Jesus gave us two simple commandments. We are to love God with all we have and to love our neighbors as ourselves."⁶⁴ He goes on to explain that we are always witnessing - the question is to what or to whom. Myers essentially says that our life is to be the witness and at the appropriate time, we are to proclaim the gospel in "response to a question provoked by the activity of God in the community. There is an action that demands an explanation, and the gospel was the explanation."⁶⁵

In summary Myers provides an excellent framework for understanding poverty and how the Christian is to witness during the process of transformational development.

Finally it is imperative to include Doug Hall's contribution to this thesis by virtue of his "Model of Faith-Based Initiatives." This work is particularly helpful in identifying the proper mental model for Christians to appropriate in doing social justice.

In laying out his model he describes two characteristics necessary for a win/win scenario to occur. First is the concentration on "working toward long-term significant goals," rather than focusing on "specific problem-solving events."⁶⁶ As he points out, two problems ensue: 1) the efforts typically create other problems and 2) by narrowly defining the problem, the complexities are ignored, resulting in a recreation of the

⁶² Ibid., 204.

⁶³ Ibid., 205.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 205.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁶⁶ Doug Hall, "A Model for Faith-based Initiatives" (Boston: Emmanuel Gospel Center, , photocopied), 3.

problem.⁶⁷ He further identifies three requirements in order to see long term systemic change. These are cooperative efforts, creating a learning environment and shared vision of the stakeholders.⁶⁸

The second characteristic, and the one which has a greater impact on the Christian community, is the development of the proper mental model to be used by Christians in doing social activities. By identifying the three mental models that are commonly used in social realities, he provides great insight to the Christian community on how to integrate its faith and its works.

In the development of his model, he defines three mental models: a) theological, b) functional, and c) dysfunctional.⁶⁹ Hall defines the theological mental model as that which comes from “divine revelation.”⁷⁰ Functional mental models are derived from “natural revelation, or truth made evident through the natural world that God created.”⁷¹ The dysfunctional mental model “involves the design often practiced in the construction of human technologies, but it is not applicable in understanding how living beings in natural and social ecological systems operate.”⁷² Hall’s explanation of the dysfunctional mental model clarifies the shortcomings of much of what is done in social ministry – resulting in only short-term effects.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁷¹ Ibid., 6.

⁷² Ibid., 7.

He then expounds on the necessity for the Christian to use the theological mental model for evangelistic work and the functional mental model for social work. His insight into the pitfalls of an improperly grounded mental model is valuable. He warns the Church of two ways its social involvement can have negative implications. The two are 1) “if the church becomes an agency” and 2) “if Christians become converted to a faith that is emptied of its distinctive purposes.”⁷³

His model then proposes a solution to ensure that “Christians who do faith-based social ministry should be people who represent a vital form of Biblical Christianity, a form of the faith that both builds a spiritual kingdom and serves the broader world indiscriminately.”⁷⁴ It uses a training and certification approach where training for social activities would utilize both the theological mental model and the functional mental model. The art of blending and distinguishing would be taught – “‘blend’ with the broader society to do social ministry and ‘distinguish’ to do evangelism.”⁷⁵

Hall’s work greatly assists in walking the tightrope between social work and ministry by providing a way of understanding the way we see reality through the three mental models.

Having set the framework for the project, the next part of examining the precedent literature will look at various models of addressing poverty by faith-based entities that have either been proposed or are in operation.

⁷³ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 13.

The most successful in terms of community impact has been the church's foray into community economic development. The prototypical effort is characterized by "large congregations, typically led by dynamic African American clergy and located in poor inner-city communities."⁷⁶ These would include those congregations led by T.D. Jakes, Floyd Flake, Kirbyjon Caldwell, Eddie Long, and Jim Holly to name just a few.

In Rev. Flake's testimony to the Senate Finance Committee, he provided a description of the work occurring during his twenty-five years of serving as Senior Pastor/CEO of Allen A.M.E. Church in Jamaica, New York. He states that new paradigms have been built by creating non-profit and for profit corporations that provide a wide range of services to the community, including educational, social and economic. And, "These faith-based institutions functioning beneath the umbrella of the Church have been credited with changing the dynamics of the community and spurring new housing and economic development projects in a community that was once viewed as blighted and unstable."⁷⁷ The list of projects he has overseen includes a senior citizens housing complex, a Christian school, a mental health center, teen counseling services, and a community health center. These initiatives have been funded by leveraging its tithes and offerings with financial support from government, foundations and private donors.

⁷⁶ Jr. Wallace, John M., Valerie L. Myers and Jim Holley, "Holistic Faith-based Development," *The Roundtable On Religion And Social Welfare*, April, 2004, http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/docs/public_resources/holistic_faith-based_development.pdf. (accessed September 15, 2006).

⁷⁷ *United States Senate*, March 14, 2001, "Testimony Of The Honorable Rev. Floyd H. Flake To The Senate Finance Committee," <http://www.senate.gov/comm/finance/general/031401ffttest.pdf>. (accessed September 15, 2006).

Recently this model has begun to receive more attention. Studies have been done which attempt to develop a new theoretical foundation that would provide guidance for those wanting to pursue faith-based development.

One of these studies, *Faith-Based Community Economic Development: Principles & Practices*, provides a summary of principles and practices. In its overview it says that in general, successful community-based enterprises have three characteristics:⁷⁸

- (1) They address an existing problem or need;
- (2) They participate in growing markets; and
- (3) They do not require employees with extensive formal training

In its description of the model, the first step is to assess the community needs and what resources are available. It emphasizes that “community residents who are active in the development process are building local development capacity and empowering themselves in the process.” This is followed by mobilizing the congregation and the community, which indicates the need for collaboration.⁷⁹

The study provides a good overview of what it takes to implement faith-based economic development.

A second study, *Holistic Faith-Based Development: Toward a Conceptual Framework*, an independent research project of the Rockefeller Institute of Government, also addresses this new paradigm. It refers to this expanded ministry of churches as holistic faith-based development. It defines this as a strategy “to minister holistically to

⁷⁸ T. David Reese and Christina A. Clamp, "Faith-Based Community Economic Development: Principles & Practices," *Federal Reserve Bank Of Boston, Public And Community Affairs Department*, <http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/faith/ced.pdf>. (accessed September 15, 2006).

⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

the human, economic, and community development needs of individuals and families both within and outside their congregations.”⁸⁰

This research project identified four reasons for the failure of social service efforts in the past. They are 1) distorted development - funding and need are out of sync; 2) disconnected development – needs are compartmentalized; 3) disjointed development – initiatives are presumed without a long-term guiding mission; and 4) disempowerment development – solutions can only come from others.⁸¹

It then proceeds to develop a comprehensive Holistic Faith-Based Empowerment Model. Its foundation is “Meeting basic needs of individuals and families for food, jobs, and homes,” with the understanding that the basis for all change is spiritual.⁸² Briefly a few of its salient points are:

- 1) Predicated on faith.
- 2) Starts with individuals proceeding through faith-based organizations to neighborhoods.
- 3) Serves as intermediary for individuals and government, legal system, non-profits, education, economics, business and religion.
- 4) Targets moving from human development to economic development to community development.

⁸⁰ Jr. Wallace, John M., Valerie L. Myers and Jim Holley, "Holistic Faith-Based Development," *The Roundtable On Religion And Social Welfare*, April, 2004, http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/docs/public_resources/holistic_faith-based_development.pdf. (accessed September 15, 2006).

⁸¹ Ibid., 6.

⁸² Ibid., 9.

It is based on the “belief that holistically healthy individuals and families are the backbone of holistically healthy faith-based organizations and holistically healthy neighborhoods and broader communities.”⁸³

These two studies provide a comprehensive description of the community development model. This model has, is, and will continue to have a large impact in communities across the nation. The holistic approach that underpins these efforts is in keeping with the Gospel. And, by the admission of one of the authors of the studies documenting this model, it is not for everyone.⁸⁴ Several reasons become apparent.

First, the philosophy of the model, to a large extent, requires several key components that are not found in every community, much less congregation. Successful implementation of the model is led by dynamic clergy with a vision and the churches tend to have a large, sound financial base. For those congregations that do not possess these characteristics community development is a limited option.

Second, very little has been written about negative unintended consequences. Although this model is holistic from the standpoint of serving the individual and community, the process continues to be linear rather than systemic as Senge would define it.

The model does make several positive contributions. It is faith-based, holistic, community oriented and seeks collaboration and empowerment.

In addition to the faith-based model discussed above, numerous proposals have been offered in the secular community. Most of these efforts have been government

⁸³ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 15.

initiatives and have failed for reasons cited before – distorted, disconnected, disjointed, and disempowerment development. However there have been others, three of which will be discussed.

J. Kenneth Blackwell, who is running for governor of Ohio, and Jerome R. Corsi, have prescribed a plan for “creating strong families, building the wealth of working people, and ending welfare” in his book, *Rebuilding America*.⁸⁵ They describe it as “an alternative, conservative model for attacking urban poverty that can be applied nationwide.”⁸⁶

In developing their model, the authors have concluded that the War on Poverty, begun under Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration, has essentially been a failure. Given the billions of dollars spent over the last forty years spanning eight administrations, Blackwell and Corsi conclude that “there are dimensions of poverty that money alone cannot solve” and that it is a social and economic problem.⁸⁷

They argue that “a dysfunctional environment produces dysfunctional results regardless of the race of the people involved.”⁸⁸ Further, they posit that “Abnormal conditions of concentrated poverty produce the abnormal behavior associated with an economic underclass for any people trapped in this situation.”⁸⁹ Extending this line of thinking Blackwell and Corsi assert that the “deterioration of the African American

⁸⁵ John Kenneth Blackwell and Jerome R. Corsi, *Rebuilding America* (Nashville: WND Books, 2006), Rear Flap.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Subtitle.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 93.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 209.

family is one of the most important consequences of the welfare system itself, not a characteristic that results from race itself.”⁹⁰ Their conclusion is that “the social concentration of the most disadvantaged segments of the black urban population create an environment in which families and economic opportunity disintegrate.”⁹¹

The linchpin of their model is that it is necessary to use the profit motive through fully engaged private business to attack the socio-economic problems. They argue that “target neighborhoods remain poor today because they lack profitable businesses that create a hub of economic activity around which the neighborhood can build.”⁹² Therefore their goal is to raise the economic level of these depressed neighborhoods. This would get more of the poor to begin working and once working to “advance to higher plateaus.”⁹³

One of the authors’ strategies is to promote the privatization of local government services. The reasoning is that by attracting private businesses into the community, the quality of life will improve by virtue of the presence of private enterprise.⁹⁴

Blackwell and Corsi use public housing as an example of injecting the profit motive into the life of the community. They cite a study done by Howard Husock that concludes that public housing has been a failure. They propose that the private sector

⁹⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁹¹ Ibid., 116.

⁹² Ibid., 159.

⁹³ Ibid., 189.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 167.

build new housing, affordable for those “with minimal incomes or those living on public assistance.”⁹⁵

Blackwell and Corsi make a strong case for involving private business in the solution set for dealing with poverty based on the failure of government programs, most notably the War on Poverty. Although they mention the need to restore the family structure and improve education, the authors offer no real strategies beyond engaging private enterprise. Their failure to address these issues will limit the overall effectiveness of his proposal.

The more traditional approach to ending poverty is the one espoused by Holly Sklar in her book, *Chaos or Community*. Her emphasis is that poverty is caused by structural barriers. She writes, “It is time to stop pretending that the problem is people with cultures of poverty and not the prevailing economy of impoverishment. It is time to pose a true alternative to the dangerous false populism of the Right.”⁹⁶

Sklar identifies sixteen national and international policies that are needed to foster “fair and sustainable development.”⁹⁷ These include All-Age Social Security – an adequate income assurance, Work Fair and Full Employment – the right to a decent job at a living wage, Conversion of the Military- Industrial Economy – the conversion to socially responsible uses, Community Investment and Redevelopment – end of all

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁶ Holly Sklar, *Chaos or Community? Seeking Solutions, Not Scapegoats for Bad Economics* (Boston: South End Press, 1995), 160.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 171.

redlining and other forms of discrimination, and Universal Health Care – a single-payer system of universal coverage.⁹⁸

Her recommendations clearly address only one cause of the problem of poverty – system or corporate evil. Although she does an admirable job of identifying the current state of impoverishment, her cornucopia of actions lacks any systemic thought regarding their long-term consequences.

William P. Quigley, in his book, *Ending Poverty as We Know It*, concentrates on one of Sklar’s recommendations – guaranteeing a right to a job at a living wage. He goes so far as to say that it is the key to ending poverty.⁹⁹ He proposes a constitutional amendment containing two principles: “(1) The right to work, and (2) the right of people who work to receive a living wage for their work.”¹⁰⁰

His argument for the need tracks to the two parts of his proposal. First, he argues that the extent of unemployment is actually much greater than commonly reported using unemployment figures. This is particularly true for minority and lower-skilled workers.¹⁰¹

The other point he makes is that there are “tens of millions of people across the nation” who are working but not earning enough to be self-sufficient.¹⁰² His definition of underemployment includes “people working part-time but who would like to be working

⁹⁸ Ibid., 171-176.

⁹⁹ William P. Quigley, *Ending Poverty as We Know It: Guaranteeing a Right to a Job at a Living Wage* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 12.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 55.

¹⁰² Ibid., 44.

full-time,” “people who are working full-time but are not earning enough to make ends meet,” and “people who are working for wages that are less than they earned before.”¹⁰³ He makes a rather dismal assessment of the 1996 change in welfare when he says, “What most mothers who have found work have discovered is that welfare, nonworking poverty has been replaced with working poverty.”¹⁰⁴

In summary Quigley’s proposal is rather simplistic. And, like Skar’s approach, totally ignores any personal responsibility or spiritual ramifications and pays no attention to any negative consequences. He does offer a point of reflection when he states, “I again remind the reader that it is dishonest and unfair to evaluate only the impact of raising the minimum wage to a living wage and to ignore the tragic daily negative impact of the current system, which condemns millions of people to work that is insufficient to allow them to be self-supporting.”¹⁰⁵

This completes my review of the precedent literature. Although this review is by no means exhaustive, it does provide the background for the purpose of this thesis-project. The works of Senge, Linthicum, and Myers have made the greatest contribution in framing both the methodology of the project and an understanding of the spiritual nature of poverty. The review of the faith-based economic model has shown it to be primarily linear in its approach. The secular offerings tend to suffer from both the lack of a systemic perspective and a lack of understanding poverty’s complexity. This thesis will draw on the strengths of the various approaches, both Christian and secular. But by

¹⁰³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 135.

pursuing a solution from a systemic view, it will offer a way to approach poverty's complexity and multifacetedness.

CHAPTER THREE

A THEOLOGY OF POVERTY

In order to establish a theology of poverty it is important to lay a foundation on which to build the theology. First it is prudent to define the phrase. According to Merriam-Webster' Online Dictionary, *theology* "is the study of religious faith, practice, and experience; *especially*: the study of God and of God's relation to the world."¹⁰⁶ Thus a Theology of Poverty must address the essence of the relationship between God and those living in poverty and those who are not.

Ultimately the thrust of a Theology of Poverty must be theocentric rather than anthropocentric – a theology that has as its root the perspective of poverty from God's viewpoint. Much of present day Christendom, unfortunately, has embraced man-centered theology. DeVern Fromke identifies "four segments of Christendom and their divergent burdens." They are the Liberals who "emphasize the social work that needs to be done BY MAN;" the Fundamentalists who emphasize "redemption-that which God must do FOR MAN;" the Holiness groups who emphasize what "God must do IN MAN;" and the Pentecostals or Charismatics who emphasize "man's need for spiritual gifting and empowerment if God is to work THROUGH MAN."¹⁰⁷ Although in each case one could

¹⁰⁶ *Merriam-Webster Online*, "Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary," <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=theology/> (accessed December 2, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ DeVern Fromke, *Ultimate Intention* (Indianapolis: Sure Foundation, 1998), 192.

argue the validity of the claim, it does seem to lend some credence to the possibility that we as Christians tend to view God and His workings from a man-centered stance. But for the theology of poverty to avoid these shortcomings, the concept must be in accord with God's ultimate intention, "that God may be all in all" (I Cor 15:28).

In summary the Theology of Poverty that will be formed will be done from the perspective of God and His ultimate intention for His sons as seen in the context of the urban development. Although this may not be explicitly addressed in the following, it is the underlying premise.

A General Theological Framework

Having laid this as a foundation, developing the Theology of Poverty will proceed as follows. A general theology will be developed which will serve as the canopy for proceeding to the more specific elements of the theology of poverty limited to the urban environment. The format will follow the one laid out by Eldin Villafañe in his book, *Seeking the Peace of the City*. It consists of three parts - a theology of context or presence, a theology of mission or purpose, and a theology of spirituality or prayer- based on Jeremiah 29:5-7.¹⁰⁸

Theology of Context

The first of Villafañe's conditions is context or the relationship of the Church to the city, cultural and society. This is an issue that has challenged Christians throughout

¹⁰⁸ Eldin Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Willaim B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 2.

the history of the church. H. Richard Niebuhr, who has called this the “Enduring Problem,” describes it as follows:

Not only pagans who have rejected Christ but believers who have accepted him find it difficult to combine his claims upon them with those of their societies. Struggle and appeasement, victory and reconciliation appear not only in the open where parties calling themselves Christian and anti-Christian meet; more frequently the debate about Christ and culture is carried on among Christians and in the hidden depths of the individual conscience, not as the struggle and accommodation of belief with unbelief, but as the wrestling and the reconciliation of faith with faith.¹⁰⁹

He later states:

When Christianity deals with the question of reason and revelation, what is ultimately in question is the relation of the revelation in Christ to the reason which prevails in culture. When it makes the effort to distinguish, contrast, or combine rational ethics with its knowledge of the will of God, it deals with the understanding of right and wrong developed in the culture and with good and evil as illuminated by Christ.¹¹⁰

This “Enduring Problem” sets the stage for our discussion of the Theology of Context as seen in the relationship of the church to the urban environment. In structuring this discussion, the relationship will be defined by two characteristics. One is that “the Church is one.” The other is that “the Church goes.”

The Church Is One

Although the concept of the universal church is widely accepted as Christian orthodoxy, its practice is rarely seen. Jack Dennison, in his book *City Reaching*, quotes

¹⁰⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1951), 10.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 11.

Argentine pastor Carlos Mraida who said: “The city is the biblical environment that defines the local character of the church.” ¹¹¹

The “church” is referred to in three dimensions. The first is the local congregation comprised of those who choose to worship and fellowship together. The second is the Church Universal made up of all the believers throughout the world. The third dimension is the City Church.

There has been little difficulty relating to the first two. Local congregations are easily discerned by their places of worship, whether they are majestic gothic structures or the small nondescript store fronts. The concept of the Church Universal, being the all inclusive and generic term that it is, likewise is less problematic. It’s the third expression that has been the challenge for modern day Christianity, at least since the Reformation.

Throughout the New Testament the concept of one Church in the city can be found. This one Church is comprised of the body of believers living and worshipping in that city. Saul and Barnabas met with the church at Antioch, a pattern continued throughout the book of Acts (Acts 11:26). Similarly many of the Epistles were addressed to the Church at the city. In I Corinthians, for example, Paul addresses his letter to “the church of God which is at Corinth” (I Cor 1:2). And in Revelation 1, John was commanded to write what he saw and “send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea” (Rev 1: 11). When Paul appointed elders he did it with the idea of a city church as evidenced in

¹¹¹ Jack Dennison, *City Reaching: On the Road to Community Transformation* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1999), 13.

Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. Given the prominence of this expression of the church in the New Testament one must wonder why it has been largely invisible and ignored.

Beginning in the mid-1990's, though, this has begun to change. Through organizations such as Mission America and CitiReach International and authors such as John Dawson, George Otis, Jr. and Ted Haggard, the concept of addressing the city by the whole city church has begun to emerge. Yet in many corners of Christianity the concept of churches of different denominations and churches with no denomination working together along with their Catholic brethren in transforming their city has been slow to materialize. However, Jesus' desire is for this unity as He says in John 17:20-21: "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send me."

The kind of unity required to express the total church in a city surpasses doctrinal consensus and experiential conformity. Rather, it is according to the Hebraic perspective that "unity is based on diversity: diversity of understanding, diversity of interpretations, and diversity of beliefs."¹¹² It consists of "functional unity" derived because of our common mission of community transformation when we recognize that we need other parts of the Body.¹¹³

¹¹² Howard Morgan, *Leaves from the Olive Tree* (Atlanta: Golden Key Books, 2001), 18.

¹¹³ Jack Dennison, *City Reaching: On the Road to Community Transformation* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1999), 62.

Unless the Church comes together in unity to transform the city, the effort of changing the world may be severely impeded. Therefore the Church in the city must be one.

The Church “Goes”

This element of the Theology of the Context addresses a fundamental attitude of the Church. The Church has suffered from a siege mentality. It has been relegated to operating within its four walls with an occasional sortie out into the world – to attack and then retreat.

The stifling pressure put on by those outside the Christian community and, for the most part, willingly accepted by the Church, has succeeded in curtailing any expression of faith in the marketplace or civil government with the phrase “don’t force your beliefs on me.” Perhaps this is best illustrated, though it may be presumptuous, in the phrase on many church marquees that says “Come and worship with us,” implying that the Church is hesitant to go where the “sinners” are.

Dennis Peacocke has a great analogy using the idea of fishers of men. He says, “Christians are the only fishermen I know who demand that the fish change their feeding habits, come to the sporting goods store (our church), and voluntarily put the hooks in their own mouths!”¹¹⁴

The commandments of Jesus are peppered with the admonition to “go.” In Matthew 10, as Jesus gave instructions to the seventy and sent them on their way, he said

¹¹⁴ Dennis Peacocke, *Doing Business God's Way* (Santa Rosa: Rebuild, 1995), xiv.

“And as you go...” (Matt 10:7). Again in Chapter 11 Jesus responds to the question asked by John and says “Go and report...” to mention just a few (Matt 11:4).

Finally, in His Great Commission, Jesus says in Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” In order to fulfill this commandment, using Peacockle’s analogy, the Christian community must go “where the fish are.”

The discussion of the Theology of Context started with Niebuhr’s “Enduring Problem.” Perhaps it is fitting that the discussion is summarized by drawing on one of his types, the conversionist, or Christ the Transformer of Culture. The essence of this approach lies in the “awareness of the power of the Lord to transform all things by lifting them up to himself.”¹¹⁵ And, it is through this power that a city-wide body of believers, knowing that it is called to its city, culture, and society, acting out of love and as one, can go and deal redemptively with the whole of society

Theology of Mission

The next step is to establish a Theology of Mission or purpose of the Church in the city, culture, and society. The mission of the Church will be examined using the two roles referred to by John in Revelation. John writes: “...and didst purchase for God with Thy blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth” (Rev 5:9-10). The mission of the Church will be examined on the basis of whom God has made us to be: priests and kings.

¹¹⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1951), 195.

The Priest

The priestly function is primarily one of reconciliation. Paul calls us to be ministers of reconciliation (II Cor 5:18). Applying this to society, there are two forms of reconciliation to be addressed. The first is the reconciliation of the Jew and Gentile. Ephesians 3:6 says: “That the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” In speaking of the Jews and Gentiles, Paul writes, “For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into one*, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, [...] that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross” (Eph 2:14-16).

It is important to see the impact of this in how God’s ultimate intention will be fulfilled. In Mathew 23:39, Jesus says He will not return until the Jews can say: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

For this to happen the Church must extend her loving arms to the Jews, for it is through the Church that the proclamation of the Gospel occurs. But, throughout the history of Christendom, the Church has been guilty of the sin described in Romans 11:18-22, where Paul gives the admonishment not to be arrogant toward the branches. Howard Morgan contends that a “wall of distortion” has been erected by the Church. He writes, “The root cause of this distortion has been the spread of a doctrine of demons describing the Jews as ‘Christ-killers,’ and therefore ‘under the curse of God,’ and as a result ‘cast away.’”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Howard Morgan, *Leaves from the Olive Tree* (Atlanta: Golden Key Books, 2001), 113.

As we establish a Biblical relationship with Jewish people and demonstrate the love of our Messiah, we will be on the way to provoking the Jews to jealousy as described in Romans 10. Thus, until Jesus comes back and God becomes all and in all, the Church is to pursue its role of reconciliation and through that reconciliation provoke the Jews to embrace their Savior, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second form of reconciliation that the Church must seek is through the cross, to reconcile all people into one body to God. This has been the primary focus of the Church albeit to a somewhat limited audience and somewhat limited in scope. One could say, looking at the growth patterns of Christianity compared to the increase in the world's population and the growth of other religions, notably Islam, that the Church has not been all that effective.

Generally the message of the Good News has been carried forth through the evangelical arm of Christianity primarily through witnessing programs. These programs have centered chiefly around getting the "witnesser" to accept Christ by saying the sinner's prayer either at special events or one-on-one. But in each case there is very little follow-up in terms of helping the new believer apply his new found faith to his every day walk. Couple that with the contradictions the world sees between the talk of the Church and its walk, and it is understandable why the Church has not kept up.

The analogy of the fish mentioned earlier is useful in illustrating the Church's approach. We are feeding the fish (the unbelievers) with food (life after death) they are not interested in rather than with food that they are feeding on (how to live successfully right now).

The Good News of the Gospel clearly does encompass the life after death issue but it has a here and now component as well. If we are to be faithful to the call to be ambassadors of reconciliation, then the way we do evangelism must change.

An examination of the way Jesus proclaimed the Gospel may be helpful in a new orientation. He began His ministry with, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). First we see that He dealt with the sin issue, calling for a leaving of the old ways. Then we see that He was calling them to a new worldview, one centered in His Kingdom. Next, the time was now, not just in the hereafter. A few verses later, Christ went about “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people” (Matt 4:23). Thus He demonstrated the presence of the Kingdom. He confirmed this as a model when He sent the seventy out, instructing them: “And as you go, preach, saying ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons” (Matt 10:7-8). When Jesus’ approach is compared to our present methods, our efforts of reconciliation are woefully lacking.

Our purpose must be to reconcile the world to God through the preaching of the Good News in word and deed. This reconciliation involves more than saying words; it reflects changed lives, lives that are lived free of the bondages of sin and oppression.

The Church’s priestly role in the city, then, is two-fold. First, the Church is to reconcile Jew and Gentile through an outpouring of love that will provoke the Jew to jealousy. Second, the Church is to reconcile the world to God through the proclamation of the Kingdom in word and deed.

The King

The other role of the Church in the City is to exercise a kingly presence. The essence of the kingdom message is that as the Sovereign God of the universe, God rules and reigns over all and His government is the one that counts. No individual, no institution, no system is exempt from being under His rule. The Church's mission is to participate in the world's recognition and ultimate realization of that truth.

Revelation 11:15 reveals the expectation of Christ's reign: "The kingdom of the world has become the *kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." The Church must participate in this changeover, but for the most part, it has opted out of its responsibility to affect the culture in which it finds itself.

Robert Linthicum says that three primary systems are required to make a city function - political, economic and religious.¹¹⁷ All other systems and social institutions such as education, health care, and social services are subsystems to these three. If the Church then is to act as God's agent, it must be involved in the redemption of these systems. Then it is through these three that Christianity as the expression of Christ is transcendent over culture.

At the center is the religious system, whether it is under the influence of the Church or not. Its responsibility is to provide the moral compass by which the actions of society are directed. This is true for all levels of society – individual, family, commerce and civil government. It is "to be the priestly, teaching, and prophetic voice to the world. Its responsibility is to correctly interpret the Word of God to all the forms of government.

¹¹⁷ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 47.

Its job is to hold that Word up to all other institutions, including itself, as a plumb line for human conduct.”¹¹⁸

The Church has restricted its primary influence to the individual and family. Its role in commerce and civil government has been met with much opposition even within the Church itself. One only needs to look at the current discussion over the Supreme Court nominees regarding their Christian beliefs and their attitude toward abortion to see the effort to keep religion out of politics.

How then is the Church to properly execute its role in relation to the political and economic two systems? To many Christians, the political arena has been one to be avoided. We hear the mantra over and over that “you can’t legislate morality” and that the Church has no business imposing its religious beliefs on society. Yet laws set boundaries on what a society should and should not do. Someone or something provides the foundation for this boundary setting. It would seem that laws based on the Gospel’s message of love - this “pure and undefiled religion” of caring for and providing for the widow, the orphan - should be the foundation on which laws are made. Without the Church holding up the unchangeable Truth as it applies to society, laws become anchorless, changing with the whims of man.

Laws that are not based on God’s laws, lead to bondage and oppression. Therefore the Church needs to be involved in establishing laws that work towards bringing order and justice in all areas of the political arena, individually and corporately.

¹¹⁸ Dennis Peacocke, *Winning the Battle for the Minds of Men* (Santa Rosa: Alive & Free, 1987), 20.

The prophets of the Old Testament spoke to cities about their need to repent and to do justice. Should the Church today do any less?

The third system functioning in the city is the economic one. Robert Lupton, in his book, *Return Flight*, stresses its importance saying, “A community will not remain healthy if it is not economically viable.”¹¹⁹ He further states that “a subsidized economy and artificial redistribution systems—which in the short run may seem necessary and expedient—serve as disincentives to economic viability and produce dependencies that ultimately weaken communities.”¹²⁰ Mark Gornik adds additional credence to the importance of work when he says, “Employment sets goals and helps give structure to life, family, and community.”¹²¹

Recently with the renewed emphasis on the marketplace ministry, the place of business and work is garnering increased attention. Although the Protestant work ethic has been identified with the birth and growth of America, the concentration on personal salvation, the preoccupation with the rapture, and the Gnostic idea that the spiritual is good and the material is bad has subverted God’s original plan on the holiness of work. Before the fall Adam was engaged in both mental work, naming the animals, and physical labor, tending the garden. Luther describes work as “the mask behind which the hidden God himself continues the creation and opposes evil and thereby gives every person what is necessary for life.”¹²² The Benedictine view of labor even goes so far as

¹¹⁹ Robert D. Lupton, *Return Flight* (Atlanta: FCS Urban Ministries, Inc, 1993), 19.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹²¹ Mark R. Gornik, *To Live in Peace* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 45.

¹²² Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 110.

to associate work with worship: “This integration of labor with worship not only enlivens his work and makes it sacred, but affects his worship. The latter becomes an exercise of his whole being-of his whole heart and soul and mind and strength, and not just his lips.”¹²³ This is consistent with Luther’s stance as he believed that daily work was a form of worship through service to one’s neighbor.¹²⁴ Therefore work is an integral part of God’s purposes for man.

In the Western world capitalism has become the de facto economic system of choice. The recent questioning of oil company executives highlight the inherent problems with a system based on supply and demand. And although it is not the perfect system, it does provide the environment for individuals to use private property to produce increase. This principle teaches us how to steward the earth. Scripture stresses that God is the ultimate owner of all (“The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains.” Psalm 24:1) This translates into the opportunity for the owner on earth to exercise stewardship.

The stewardship concept occurs throughout the Scriptures. In Genesis God told Adam to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). In the New Testament the Parable of the talents illustrates this precept. John Wesley wrote: “We are not at liberty to use what he has lodged in our hands as we please, but as he pleases who alone is the possessor of heaven and earth, and the Lord of every creature.”¹²⁵ The Old Testament principles such as jubilee, gleaning, and interest suggest

¹²³ Dom Rembert Sorg, *Holy Work: Towards a Benedictine Theology of Manual Labor* (Santa Ana, California: Source Books, 2003), 69.

¹²⁴ Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 108.

¹²⁵ Jr. Jennings, Theodore W, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 101.

that private property was to be used to take care of those less fortunate. Peacocke's perspective is that it is through the exercise of stewardship over private property that the Christian grows in maturity.¹²⁶

What then is the responsibility of the Church in this environment? The Church's assignment in the economic arena is two-fold. First the Church is to provide the moral compass by speaking against unfair labor practices, corporations driven solely by the bottom line, and the vanishing work ethic. It must teach God's perspective on work, that work is holy. In short we must be proactive in defeating the Gnostic thinking that the material world is bad, which has permeated large parts of evangelical Christianity. Thankfully, organizations such as Christian International Business Network, Marketplace Ministries, and Marketplace Leaders have begun to address this need.

The other task for the Church is to become involved in economic development in those areas of the city suffering from the disappearance of work and the concomitant socio-economic problems. As the well-documented gap between the haves and have-nots continues to grow, a window of opportunity has emerged for the Church. Linthicum calls the Church to action saying, "Promotion of economic justice, control of the distribution of an economy, particular attention to the hurting of any urban society, and using the law of love as the highest code by which a city structures itself" becomes the basis for economic development.¹²⁷ He follows this with the need for the Church to respond

¹²⁶ Dennis Peacocke, *Doing Business God's Way* (Santa Rosa: Rebuild, 1995), 17.

¹²⁷ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 169.

through “the creation of jobs, the organizing of people to create community industries and trades, job re-training, economic self-determination, advocacy of the poor.”¹²⁸

At this time in history the Church is being called to its kingly role. In this role as guardian of the city, it is incumbent on the Church to work for the transformation of the three primary systems of the city-political, economic and religious-so, in conjunction with the power of God, “the kingdom of the world” will “become the kingdom of our Lord” (Rev. 11:15).

In summary, two prominent roles in the Old Testament, priest and king, have been used to define the mission or purpose of the Church in the city, culture and society. The priestly role spoke to the reconciliation that is needed between Jew and Gentile and between man and God. The kingly role addressed the transformation of the systems of the city to promote order and justice. In order to avoid any pretense of an artificial separation between the two, we may further summarize the role of the Church by invoking Jeremiah 29:7. “Seek the peace of the city.” In the Hebrew the word for peace is *shalom*. Linthicum gives perhaps the best definition of *shalom* when he writes, “Shalom is a state of wholeness and completeness possessed by a person or a group that includes good health, prosperity, security, justice, and deep spiritual contentment.”¹²⁹ The Church is called to be an instrument of peace in the city as it “preaches and lives out the Shalom of God.”¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid., 169.

¹²⁹ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 86.

¹³⁰ Eldin Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 2.

The prophet, Micah, effectively summarized it when he said: “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Theology of Spirituality

The third aspect in defining a general theological framework is to construct a Theology of Spirituality. It is of paramount importance to understand the realm of the spirit, particularly as it relates to the city. As we survey the landscape of our cities, one thing that is readily apparent is that evil is present. The media outlets all remind us that man’s inhumanity to man is rampant. However, unless we understand this as a battle that is raging, our efforts - whether they are in the natural realm or the spiritual realm - will be ineffective at best.

Throughout the New Testament, the presence of an opponent to the Kingdom of God is portrayed. It is referred to in many different ways including “the god of this world” (II Cor 4:4), “the evil one” (I John 5:19), “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2), “the devil and Satan” (Rev. 20:2). His purpose is as a thief, “to steal, and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). The effect is to oppose the kingdom rule of God by setting up his own kingdom as illustrated in the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness when he offered Christ the kingdoms of this world if Jesus would worship him. In I John 3:8, the counter to Satan’s plan is presented: “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil” and in John’s Gospel on the heels of what the thief does, Jesus says that He came that “they might have life, and might have it abundantly.” What follows logically is that evil stands in the way of the Kingdom and is to be opposed at all levels.

Seeing the ills in the city points to the battle going on between two opposing camps. Dawson writes:

We should not focus on the evil, while ignoring the evil one. We tend to look at problems caused by fallen angels without seeing them as the cause. In the daily newspaper we read reports of gang violence, corrupt government and child abuse, without clearly establishing the connection to the very real conflict in the unseen realm.¹³¹

So it would appear that if there is this war going on in the spiritual realm, the Church needs to be engaged. But first, there must be a change in mentality. Many Christians have the perspective that “the world is going to hell in a handbag” and our only hope is the Second Coming of the King of Kings, riding in on a white horse, to rescue us. This mentality along with dualistic thinking has paralyzed most of the Church and kept us out of the battle.

The new mentality, however, recognizes that there is a cosmic war underway and that we are called to join in the battle for the hearts and minds of the people of this world. It is not optional. At the time one becomes a born again son of God, one automatically becomes part of the conflict. The problem is that we are unaware of the battle.

This warfare mentality comes though with the full knowledge that the war has already been won. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, the victory has been secured once and for all and we are “more than conquerors.” His proclamation on the cross, “It is finished,” confirms the ultimate victory (John 19:30). However as we live in that time between the “already” and the “not yet” of the Kingdom, “The church is to manifest the truth that God’s kingdom has come and that Satan’s kingdom is defeated. Thus in its

¹³¹ Jack Dennison, *City Reaching: On the Road to Community Transformation* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1999), 133-134.

own way, under the victorious authority of Christ, the church is to engage and overthrow evil powers, just as Jesus himself has done.”¹³²

Knowing this, how is the Church to venture into the fray. The aforementioned discussion of the battle, and more specifically the presence of Satan, carries with it a potential danger of being out of balance with a preoccupation of Satan. Christians are often accused of knowing more about what Satan is doing than what God is doing in our cities. So the focus must remain on God and to that end we can continue with examining our weapons for this warfare.

Paul writes, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (II Cor 10:3-4).

Given the scope of the conflict, any action taken by the Church which works against Satan’s realm could be considered a “weapon.” For our purposes prayer and praise will be examined in the context of the cosmic conflict evidenced in the city.

Throughout the years many books have been written on prayer. Only in the last half of the twentieth century has much attention been given to the use of prayer as a weapon of warfare in community transformation. Much of the prayer efforts up to that time could be classified more according to “Ready, Shoot” rather than “Ready, Aim, Fire.” The effectiveness of prayer as a tool in transforming our cities is greatly enhanced when it has a strategic component to it.

One of the major developments to make prayer more strategic has been the concept of spiritual mapping. George Otis, Jr. in his book *Informed Intercession*,

¹³² Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 239.

emphasizes the importance of understanding the spiritual aspects of our cities by Christians. He writes: “Having embraced the language and worldview of the Enlightenment, they dismiss spiritual vision as superstitious folly. Ask them to explain why things are the way they are in their communities, and they will instinctively turn to the oracles of sociology, economics or politics. Talk of spiritual explanations and you have bounded outside their comfort zone.”¹³³ Spiritual mapping provides a diagnostic tool to see how the evil one is working in our communities. In short it enhances our view of realities that are hindering the advancement of the Kingdom including “repressed hurts (associated with unresolved social injustice), spiritual pacts (*quid pro quo* solutions to individual or corporate trauma) and demonic strongholds (both psychic and territorial).”¹³⁴

The traditional definition of the spiritual mapping described above focuses on the barriers to the coming of the Kingdom. But equal attention needs to be given to seeing where God is working. As mentioned previously, Christians generally have no idea where God is working in the city or what He is doing. So much attention has been paid to Satan (the demon behind every rock syndrome), that the Good Work of the Kingdom often goes at least unreported and generally undetected. Every city has been created for a purpose. That purpose provides a powerful basis for strategic prayers of blessing.

By understanding the reality of the spirit realm at work in our cities, prayer can become focused and targeted. As we pray using Psalm 122 as the model for urban prayer - for the economic health, the safety, the political order, and the people - we can know

¹³³ Jr. Otis, George, *Informed Intercession* (Ventura: Renew Books, 1999), 80.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 81.

what to pray against and what to bless, what lies to bring to light and what promises to apply.¹³⁵

The other weapon is praise. Along with the Charismatic movement came new freedom in song and new comprehension of the power of praise and worship. The power of praise is a tool in the arsenal of spiritual weaponry that is beginning to be released.

In understanding the warfare going on between the two kingdoms, the battle is always the Lord's. The victory has already been secured by Christ. When praise is expressed by the people of God, the Lord goes forth to defeat His enemies. Isaiah 42:12-13 expresses it this way: "Let them give glory to the Lord and declare His praise in the coastlands. The Lord will go forth like a warrior, He will arouse His zeal like a man of war. He will utter a shout, yes He will raise a war cry. He will prevail against His enemies."

This connection between the praises of His people and His entering into the battle can be seen in the New Testament as well. As Jesus approached Jerusalem, the multitudes cried out saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:12). He then entered the temple and drove out those who were buying and selling, overturned the tables of the moneychangers, and healed the blind and the lame. When the chief priests and scribes saw the "wonderful things that He had done" and heard the praises of the children, they questioned Jesus. His response was: "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes thou has prepared praise for thyself" (Psalm 8:2). Even though Christ had been in the temple

¹³⁵ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 149.

many times when the merchants and moneychangers were present, it was at this time, the time of demonstrative praise, that He rose up to restore His house to a house of prayer.

Perhaps the day is coming when the believers will march through the battlefields where oppression and injustices are occurring with the shout of praise on their lips and see the enemies of darkness flee before them as the captives are set free.

The Theology of Spirituality would be incomplete without at least briefly including three other p's: presence, power and person. Prayer and praise represent what we do; presence, power and person represent what we must have. Presence speaks of the intimate relationship with the Triune God, "Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). Power is that which enables us to be "witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Person refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who "will lead you to the complete truth" (NJB John 16:13).

Thus, the Theology of Spirituality posits that there is a great cosmic war going on as Satan and his forces vie for control of this world. Knowing that Christ has secured the victory through His death and resurrection, the Church is called to execute God's judgment against the "prince of this world." At its disposal are weapons of warfare. One is strategic prayer that shines the light on the lies and speaks forth through blessing where God is at work. Another is the praise of His people that, as the Lord is praised He rises up with zeal and vengeance to defeat His enemies. The rendering of prayer and praise is done with the presence, power, and third person of the Trinity.

Summarizing, this general framework has been formulated from a theocentric perspective through the development of a Theology of Context, a Theology of Mission

and a Theology of Spirituality. The Theology of Context identified two characteristics of the Church in relation to the city, culture and society: the Church is one and the Church goes. The Theology of Mission examined the role of the Church in relation to being priests and kings. As priests, the Church is to reconcile the Jew and Gentile as one new man and to reconcile the world to God. As kings, the Church is to promote the transformation of the primary systems of the city – religious, political and economic.

The Theology of Spirituality established the weapons of warfare the Church is to use in participating in the cosmic war between two kingdoms. The first is the use of strategic prayer that identifies lies to be dispelled and truths to be blessed. The second weapon is praise that causes the Lord to defeat His enemies.

God in His infinite wisdom has chosen the Church to be His agents and as the urbanization of the world continues the city looms as the focal point. With His presence, power and the person of the Holy Spirit, cities will be transformed. “Then *comes* the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. [...] then the Son himself also will be subjected to the One who has subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all” (I Cor 15:24-28).

Poverty in an Urban Setting

Having set the stage with this discussion of a general theology, the next step in formulating a Theology of Poverty will be to examine the calling of the church in confronting poverty in the context of the city. This begins with an understanding of the relationship of the Church to the city and the nature of the poverty. Then the theological basis for how the Church is to implement its responsibility will be established. Finally,

the normative obligation of the Church in relation to poverty in an urban setting will be addressed.

Understanding the Church, City, and Poverty

The City

The Church's relationship to the city will be established by prescribing three characteristics: the Church is called to the City, the Church loves the City, and the Church deals redemptively with the whole City.

First the Church is called to the City. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we see the central point that cities have occupied. The trail of cities begins in Genesis 4 with Enoch, which was founded by Cain and produced the instruments of civilization. It ends with "the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God" (Rev 21: 10). Along the way a whole host of cities are encountered. Some are well known like Sodom and Gomorrah, Babylon, Ephesus, Corinth and Rome. Others like Eglon, Gath, Thamma, and Ginae are much less known. But there is little doubt that much of what is chronicled in the Bible involves cities in one form or another.

Numerous sources have stated that currently over half of the world's population now lives in urban areas and that percentage will rapidly increase. It is estimated that by the year 2030 six out of every ten people on earth will live in a metropolitan area.¹³⁶ Therefore it seems somewhat logical that the Church should be found leavening the city, permeating it with the Truth of the Gospel. Unfortunately many Christians have

¹³⁶ Elise F. Jones, "Our Urban Future," *Population Resource Center*, 2003, <http://www.prcdc.org/summaries/urbanization/urbanization.html>. (accessed November 29, 2006).

developed an escapist mentality whether that is illustrated by the exodus of churches from the inner city or rapid expansion of our metropolitan areas to outlying small towns where commuters seek to get away from it all.

Robert Linthicum, in his book *City of God City of Satan*, challenges Christians' views on this by examining the Jews' arrival in Babylon as detailed in Jeremiah. His poignant question of "Exiled or Sent" sheds an interesting perspective on why the Jews ended up in Babylon. He contends that circumstances are merely the means God uses to get us to where He wants us.¹³⁷

In the Scriptures, God's call is always "to" something or someplace. Abram was called "to a land that I will show you" (Gen 12:1). Israel was called "from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites" (Ex 3:8). Paul was to "bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Jesus in responding to the woman with the demon-possessed daughter states that He was sent "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24).

Linthicum suggests that the answer to the question of why one is in the city where one is, is because "God has called you there."¹³⁸ Therefore as Christians find themselves in an ever increasing urbanized world, we must see our residence as part of a metropolitan area, not as a sentence, but as a calling. Further our attitude towards that calling must be based on love.

¹³⁷ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 148.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 148.

Next, the Church loves the City. Clearly cities display both the good and bad sides of man. On the one hand, we see this on an individual basis as evidenced by idolatry, violence, greed, sexual perversion and many other sins (Gal 5:19-21). This is true on a corporate, or systemic, basis as well. These are those systems that are part of the fabric of the city whether political, educational, economic, cultural or even religious that encourage, or at least allow, the exploitation of the poor and marginalized of the city.

In spite of the spiritual temperature of the city, God has demonstrated His unconditional love for the city. Going back to Sodom and Gomorrah, God was willing to save a city whose sin was very grave for the sakes of the righteous. In the case of Nineveh, the base of the Assyrian Empire, He sent Jonah to give them the word God had for them. And at the preaching of Jonah, “the people of Nineveh believed in God; ...When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it” (Jonah 3:5,10).

Jesus expressed His love for the city when He lamented over Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings” (Matt 23: 37).

Finally, at the end of the age, the city will be the abode of the Triune God. John describes what he saw: “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2).

From these passages, God’s love and plans for the city are apparent. Several years ago, a pastor in Athens, GA while driving around doing errands, felt the Lord say “I

love this city. I wish my people would, too.” This, then, is the challenge for the Church of today: to love the city as God loves the city.

Lastly, the Church deals redemptively with the whole City. In examining this next plank, the emphasis is on the need for the Church to work toward the redemption of every aspect of the city. This implies that the City is to be looked at systemically.

Clifford Green perhaps best articulates this view when he states:

The contextual understanding of urban reality according to the metropolitan paradigm is that cities are *systems, structural entities*, which must be understood as *wholes* comprised of *interdependent variables*: a city must be viewed holistically as a metropolis. The *polis* is not simply downtown, nor is it the inner city isolated from its suburbs. The *polis* is the whole life-complex comprising areas of residence, work, and recreation.¹³⁹

The city, or metropolis as Green refers to it, is comprised of a myriad of systems and subsystems. Because of the city being a living organism, the ability to transform one segment must be pursued in the context of the city as a whole. Doing otherwise results in the inability to see the entirety of reality. Issues are dealt with as single issues, ignoring their interdependence on other factors.

On the other hand the city is also comprised of individuals. Our urban environment of today spans the spectrums of age, socio-economic status, ethnicity and life styles. Recently much of what has been written about the Church’s social responsibility primarily focuses on the poor and the inner city. In fact, a theology has arisen, called Liberation Theology, with its emphasis on the liberation of the poor through the process of social and structural liberation. But the salvific efforts of the

¹³⁹ Clifford J. Green, ed., *Churches, Cities, and Human Community* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 294.

Church must be concerned with all of the diverse parts of the city – individual as well as systemic, and each of their components.

Poverty

Having examined the Church's role in the city, the next phase is to gain an understanding of the essence of poverty. Two critical issues will be examined. The first is "What is poverty?" The second is "What are the causes of poverty?"

In answering the question, "What is poverty?" Lindberg places the discussion in perspective:

The terms "poor" and "poverty" are notoriously elastic words. In fact, these terms are very difficult to define. Wealth is measurable but poverty is intangible. Although wealth and poverty are relative to each other, it is much easier to comprehend the former than the latter. The poor person is not only the individual bereft of the means of existence, but also the weakest person in a group or society, whether it be in terms of money, privilege, or prestige.¹⁴⁰

However, it is incumbent on our discussion to delve into this morass. A starting point is the federal government's definition of poverty. It is based on the number of individuals in a household and the income level of the household. For a family of three, for example, poverty is defined as a household with an annual income of less than \$15,020 in 2002. However, few would argue that this is a sufficient level of income to provide for "basic" necessities. This is a rather outdated statistic and has drawn a fair amount of criticism based on the lack of geographic specificity and the assumption of maintaining a 1950's standard of living. More realistic measures such as the one developed by the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project, would increase the poverty

¹⁴⁰ Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 18.

line for a family of consisting of two adults and an infant preschooler living in Athens-Clarke County would be \$37,962.¹⁴¹

In the calculation of any threshold, many subjective, and therefore value-based assumptions, are required to determine an acceptable standard of living. These entail budget items such as health insurance, entertainment, clothes, and transportation (public versus private).

These statistical measures only address one aspect of poverty – the material side. Bryant Myers’ definition of poverty entails not just material poverty, but physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability, powerlessness, and spiritual poverty (See a more detailed explanation in the precedent literature review of Bryant Myers’ *Walking with the Poor*).¹⁴² This more expansive view, although perhaps more accurate, becomes much harder to quantify. It is not as helpful in measuring progress towards the war on poverty, but it is germane to understanding the dynamics that enter in to the concept of poverty.

There have been recent efforts to construct a social model of justice and poverty based on the concept of shalom, one of which is a proposal by Timothy Slaper. He outlines an approach to a model “according to a biblical vision of shalom.”¹⁴³ However, so far, this proposal has not gained much traction.

In the end an agreed upon definition may never be finalized. It runs the gamut from absolute to relative and from physical to spiritual. Shipler writes, “There is a broad

¹⁴¹ Diana Pearce and Jennifer Brooks, *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Georgia* (Atlanta: Wider Opportunities for Women, Women's Policy Group, 2002), Wider Opportunities for Women, 52.

¹⁴² Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 83-86.

¹⁴³ David P. Gushee, ed., *Toward a Just and Caring Society* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 224.

strip of contested territory between destitution and comfort, and the passage is not the same distance for everyone.”¹⁴⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, the government’s poverty measure will be used. At the same time it is recognized that it is a “complex, multifaceted phenomenon” and the Church needs to be “multidisciplinary; we need the tools of anthropology, sociology, social psychology, spiritual discernment, and theology, all nicely integrated.”¹⁴⁵

The other critical issue in developing an appropriate response to poverty is to understand the causes of poverty. Two separate approaches will be examined: conventional wisdom and a more expansive approach espoused by Bryant Myers.

Conventional wisdom usually falls into one of three camps. The first is related to macro events – natural disasters or cyclical economic downturns and generally does not get much attention because of the inability for anyone to affect the direction or duration. The predominance of the national debate centers on the remaining two – structural causes and individual responsibility.

Structural causes, which are also referred to as systemic, emanate from the forces of the economy. These are barriers that hide behind the faceless institutions of government, businesses, education, health care, culture, and even the Church. It is an environment that fosters oppression of those living in poverty through the policies and practices of those institutions. These become apparent in such practices as discrimination, low wages, predatory lending practices, lack of affordable housing, and

¹⁴⁴ David K. Shipler, *The Working Poor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 7.

¹⁴⁵ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 86.

inaccessibility to affordable health care. Lumped into this category as well, are such conditions as a shift from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy, technological changes which enable people to be replaced by machines, and a global economy which permits the movement of jobs across national lines. On the national scene this is the position taken by the Democratic Party.

Individual causes or symptoms of poverty relate to conditions pertaining to the decisions made by individuals. These include breakup of the nuclear family, where statistics show that the best indicator of poverty is a single-parent family headed by a female. Also out-of-wedlock births, substance abuse, and other non-normative behavior fall into this category. Coupled with these is the display of a poor work ethic characterized by frequent absenteeism, tardiness, insubordination, etc. The lack of personal responsibility is the mantra put forth by the Republican Party on the national level.

Myers takes a somewhat different approach (See the review of *Walking with the Poor* in Chapter 2). He looks at it as a continuum that begins with needs and advances to a worldview. Along the way, he identifies physical, social, mental and spiritual causes. Myers concludes by saying that ultimately it is “deceptive and dominating relationships, because we are unable to love God and neighbor.”¹⁴⁶

Some Christian authors who address the issue of the causes of poverty - specifically, Mott, Myers, Villafañe, and Linthicum among others – lay the root of the problem at the feet of sin. Whether this is manifested through the failings of society’s

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 88.

structure and institutions, as the result of personal choices, or because of the breakdown of relationships, each cause ultimately falls on the shoulders of sinful man.

To see the impact of sin on the structural causes, Mott perhaps sums it up best:

In describing social reality and social evil our intention is by no means to argue against individual responsibility for our social life. The powers are able to rule because individuals follow their influence and conform themselves to the world-order in actions which are system serving rather than system critical. The objective social situation and individual choice exert influence on each other. Social entities came into being through individual decisions; they result from the conscious decisions of individuals over the years. But they also are powerful influences upon our choices. ... Our institutions are not just a constraint on sin (a conservative attitude toward institutions); they themselves are full of sin.¹⁴⁷

Linthicum says: "But systems can be demonic as well, enhancing the economic privilege of a few while exploiting the poor and powerless, using the political order to further such exploitation while maintaining a city's order, and turning faith commitment into formalized religion that legitimizes 'the powers that be' while benefiting from the powers' largess."¹⁴⁸

Even though sin, as the root of personal choices and non-normative behavior, receives less attention in the literature, even among Christian authors, it is no less true. Sider makes a passing reference to it when he says: "But to deny that persons make individual choices which help create poverty denies reality. It also obscures the fact that evangelism and divine transformation of rebellious sinners is central to the solution of some forms of poverty."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 14.

¹⁴⁸ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 63.

¹⁴⁹ Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christian in an Age of Hunger* (United States of America: W Publishing Group, 1997), 126.

Scripture is quite clear in equating personal characteristics with poverty. It is the result of laziness (Prov 6:10-11, 10:4, 20:13, 24:33-34), being uncorrectable (Prov 13:18), idleness (Prov 28:19), hastiness (Prov 21:5), and excess eating and drinking (Prov 23:20-21).

But with “works of the flesh” such as adultery, fornication, drunkenness and the other “works of the flesh,” leading to the disintegration of the family, sin is clearly at the forefront. As Gushee states: “The raw fact of the matter is this: *the best predictor of financial well-being for children and women is marriage, while the best predictor of poverty is single motherhood.*”¹⁵⁰

One component of this root cause that gets no attention in the secular media is the role that “principalities and powers” play in this drama. These represent the forces headed by Satan. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians writes, “For we do not struggle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). Mott writes, “Evil exists external to the individual not only in the order of society but also in the social and political roles of powerful supernatural beings.”¹⁵¹ In portraying “powers and principalities” Linthicum takes a somewhat different tack. He shows that these are “the spiritual forces that work through the structures and systems of the city nation, or universe.”¹⁵² He posits that these forces may be “celestial,” “terrestrial

¹⁵⁰ David P. Gushee, ed., *Toward a Just and Caring Society* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 510.

¹⁵¹ Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 6.

¹⁵² Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 68.

and earthly,” or at the same time “celestial and terrestrial.”¹⁵³ But, whatever the form, they are always present and “their real existence is behind the scenes in a system of hostile values vying for control of the life of the world.”¹⁵⁴

In summary, using the words of Myers, “The cause of poverty is fundamentally spiritual.”¹⁵⁵ Since sin is the root of poverty, regardless of which of the myriad of causes one wants to focus on, does this provide a platform from which the Church is to speak?

The Church’s Responsibility

The next step looks at the Church’s obligation. As we proceed, several concepts will be covered. The first will tackle the issue of who are the poor. This will incorporate a brief study of the word “poor” as it is used in the Old and New Testaments. Next we will examine a couple of key concepts related to poverty and justice. These include the concepts of work and private property. This will be followed by God’s view of the poor. Finally, we will sum it up with the Christian’s duty to those living in poverty.

Who Are the Poor

The question of who are the poor evokes a wide range of possibilities. In the Old Testament primarily three words were used – *l d*, *yn* (, and *awyb*). Strong’s Concordance

¹⁵³ Ibid., 68.

¹⁵⁴ Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 15.

¹⁵⁵ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 88.

offers the following definitions. *l d* means lean, needy.¹⁵⁶ *yn(* means afflicted, humble, lowly, needy.¹⁵⁷ *awyb)* is defined as destitute, beggar, needy.¹⁵⁸ To get a sense of how they were used, a cursory review of pertinent verses would be helpful. The prophets often used them in the reference to the poor being oppressed or exploited (Amos 4:1, Eze 18:12, Jer 20:3). Linthicum offers the view that these three words are used by the prophet Amos to identify three different types of poverty: *awyb)*, the exploited; *l d*, the impoverished; and *yn(*, the oppressed.¹⁵⁹

In the New Testament, the word used most often for poor is *ptwxoʹ*. It is defined to be “one who is in absolute and abject poverty,” one “who has nothing and is begging for help.”¹⁶⁰

Although the New Testament does not speak of the poor in the same context as the Old Testament, both clearly convey the sense that there is a clear need for assistance. However we need to explore this at a deeper level. It could be argued that one who is living in poverty regardless of the cause, is being oppressed. In *Beyond Charity*, Carter Lindberg references the effort made during the Middle Ages “to distinguish the able-

¹⁵⁶ James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1890), 31.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁵⁹ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 91.

¹⁶⁰ Ronald E. Cottle, *The Christian's Declaration of Independence* (Springfield, Missouri: CCLM Publications, 1985), 17.

bodied beggar from the truly needy, the ‘unworthy’ poor from the ‘worthy poor.’”¹⁶¹

The church orders separated the “legitimate poor” into “those suffering the emergency contingencies of life and those who were marginalized.”¹⁶² The first group consisted of:

citizens impoverished through no fault of their own (for example, by an unjust credit system); tradesmen and day laborers who through accident or misfortune fell into hardship; the sick and the disabled who were unable to work; widows and orphans without relatives and friends to support them; poor women in childbed; poor students who had to beg to support themselves.¹⁶³

The other group included “endangered spouses and children in ruined marriages; sick or poor strangers with no place to turn; prisoners (because Christ said to visit them); and those awaiting capital punishment.”¹⁶⁴

Obviously that distinction between the “worthy poor” and the “unworthy poor” has largely disappeared in today’s discussion. One verse that I have not seen in any discussion of poverty in the literature is II Thessalonians 3:10, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” If we are to factor this verse into our thinking, what are the implications in terms of the Church’s obligation?

One other aspect of those living in poverty to add to our list is those who are underemployed. Quigley cites three groups that fall into this category. The first are those who are working part-time but would like to work full-time. The second are those

¹⁶¹ Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 22.

¹⁶² Ibid., 168.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 168.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 168-169.

who are working full-time but still not making it. The third group is those who are working for less than what they earned previously.¹⁶⁵

Theological Basis

Now that we have, at least at some level, identified who the poor are, the next phase is to look into some Biblical concepts related to poverty and justice. God's view of the poor will be considered as seen from the concept of the Kingdom of God, the closely connected word pair, love and justice, the very specific statements the Bible makes about the poor and concomitantly, the Christian's duty to the poor. All of these posit that there is no dearth of evidence in supporting a Christian obligation to respond to poverty.

The Kingdom of God and the *shalom* it offers provides a wide canopy that deals with the ultimate intention of God. From the beginning God lays out basic principles that affect our relationships. That having been made in the image of the Triune God, the Body of Christ is to be in loving and self-giving relationships. Further, that man being made in that image has dignity and value. This is so much so, that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. Mott says "one of love's greatest contributions to social responsibility is the establishment of the value of every person."¹⁶⁶ As Christ opened the Tenach, and read from Isaiah 61, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the

¹⁶⁵ William P. Quigley, *Ending Poverty as We Know It* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 61.

¹⁶⁶ Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 48.

favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18). As Myers says, “Jesus’ mission is a holistic mission to the poor.”¹⁶⁷

The themes of love and justice are indelibly entwined with working with the poor. First we see that love, as the greatest commandment revealed in Matthew 22, is directed to God and our neighbor. Next we see that love and justice are held in close relationship as found in Hosea 10:12, “Sow for yourselves justice, reap the fruit of steadfast love.” Mott says that “Justice carries out what love motivates.”¹⁶⁸ But this justice is not just a coping mechanism for oppression but removes it as well.¹⁶⁹

The most striking characteristic of this biblical justice is the “partiality to the weak.”¹⁷⁰ Sider goes on to identify four ways that illustrates God’s concern for the poor.¹⁷¹ The first is that God is working to lift up the poor and the oppressed. Second, God moves against the rich if they get so by oppressing the poor or by not sharing with the needy. Third, by caring for the poor, it is similar to helping God. And fourth, God requires that His concern for the poor is shared by His people.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 lays out the principle:

If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart,

¹⁶⁷ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 35.

¹⁶⁸ Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 54.

¹⁶⁹ David P. Gushee, ed., *Toward a Just and Caring Society* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 27.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹⁷¹ Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 57-58.

nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.

The destruction of Sodom illustrates God's demand for helping poor. In Ezekial 16:49, the Lord gives the reason: "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy." The Scriptures treatment of the poor, though, is not limited strictly to the poor's viewpoint and how those with resources are to act. It also speaks to the rich, both from the standpoint of responding for the good of the poor as well as for the rich's own good. The rich are admonished to not withhold assistance from the poor. On the other hand the Scriptures also speak of positive incentives to respond. Isaiah 58: 6-12 gives clear promises to those who serve the poor:

Is this not the fast which I chose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the Glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will become like midday. And the Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. And those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will raise up the age-old foundations; and you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell.

Thus the Church has a role to play in the Kingdom. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the Church becomes the visible sign of the Kingdom and as such is to carry out the mandate of the Kingdom by assisting in the redemption of creation. And, since

“the impact of the fall is on both the individual and the social system,” the Gospel message of the Kingdom must be directed to both.¹⁷²

Christ’s purpose in coming as stated in I John 3:8 was to destroy the works of the devil. As followers of Christ, our mandate, our obligation, our worship, is in the service to others. To do as He states in Luke 4:38, to preach the good news, bind up the brokenhearted, set the captives free, and proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.

One other outcome of the involvement of the Church in the culture has been “social lift.” This is the phenomenon that occurs when the health, education, and the economy improve with the incursion of the Gospel. The Church’s ability to inculcate “values like hard work, discipline, thrift, supportive family ties, and so forth, all of which contribute towards the ‘social lift’ often observed in periods of revivals in church history,” needs to be recognized.¹⁷³

It is the plan of God to establish His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven with the restoration of His creation, both individuals and systems, with a special concern for the poor, and with the participation of the Church. In what concrete ways is the Church to walk this out?

The Normative Obligation of the Church

We now come to the crux of the issue of poverty and the Church. With an examination of the nature of poverty and its seemingly wide range of causes and the

¹⁷² Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 49.

¹⁷³ Hwa Yung, "Missiological Implications of Dr. David Yonggi Cho's Theology," Pentecostal-charismatic Theological Inquiry International, April 2004, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj13/yung.html>. (accessed November 22, 2006).

biblical call to the Church to respond, it is now appropriate to identify concrete ways that the Christian and the Church can respond to poverty.

Upon initial inspection, the first observation we can make is that there is a veritable plethora of ministries, both church and para-church, that have set out to deal with this issue. Using Myers's continuum, they range from meeting physical needs, usually on a local level, to working on the changing ideologies at a national level.¹⁷⁴

At the physical needs level, here in Athens, Oconee Street Methodist Church in cooperation with some thirty other congregations, serve a hot meal daily to between one hundred and one hundred fifty people. The Sparrow's Nest, a para-church organization, expands service to the poor by operating a clothes closet, a place for the homeless to shower and wash clothes, and a life skills section that offers assistance ranging from tutoring to transportation.

Moving along the spectrum, Christian Community Development Association is a nationwide organization whose philosophy of Christian community development states: "The solutions are coming from people who see themselves as the replacements, the agents, for Jesus here on earth, in their own neighborhoods and communities."¹⁷⁵ Its mission is "to inspire and train Christians who seek to bear witness to the Kingdom of God by reclaiming and restoring under-resourced communities."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 82.

¹⁷⁵ *Christian Community Development Association*, "Philosophy," <http://www.cdda.org/?p=10/> (accessed December 2, 2005).

¹⁷⁶ *Christian Community Development Association*, "Mission," <http://www.cdda.org/?p=9/> (accessed December 2, 2005).

At the other end of the spectrum, Call to Renewal is one of the organizations that is working “to influence local and national public policies and priorities, while growing and developing a movement of Christians committed to overcoming poverty.”¹⁷⁷

Summary

Given the wide variety of Christian efforts working on the issue of poverty, it may be helpful to summarize a few salient points to serve as principles as the Body attempts to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

The first is to remember that “the poor are people with names, people to whom God has given gifts, and people with whom and among whom God has been working before we even know they are there.”¹⁷⁸ Therefore the Church must be actively involved in the process. Church sponsored programs supported by tithes and offerings are one way. But the other, more important way, is to become actively engaged in the process, to put feet to our talk. The result is two-fold. On the one hand, we break “down the walls that make so much human affliction invisible to us. Whether these are the walls of a prison, behind which we hide the ‘criminal’; the walls of a hospital, behind which we hide the mentally ill; the stained-glass walls with which we hide ourselves from those who are of a different (or of no) faith.”¹⁷⁹ The other result is that by visiting the

¹⁷⁷ *Call To Renewal*, "About Us: What Is Call To Renewal," http://www.calltorenewal.org/about_us/index.cfm/action/what_is_CTR.html.

¹⁷⁸ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 58.

¹⁷⁹ Jr. Jennings, Theodore W, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 57.

marginalized, “we invite them to transform us, to transform our hearts, to transform our understanding, to transform us into instruments of the divine mercy and justice.”¹⁸⁰

Second, overcoming poverty is a spiritual issue. Only through transformation of people and systems can poverty be adequately dealt with. If ultimately the root cause of poverty is sin, then who better to tackle it than the Church, whom God has uniquely gifted to fight spiritual battles individually and corporately. This will require the activation of the full arsenal of spiritual weapons delineated in the first part of this chapter. To do this the Church must begin to act as the Body of Christ – recognizing that each part of the Church, whether a corporate body or an individual, possess a God-ordained calling and acting as one, dismissing the doctrinal barriers that have erected walls between brethren. Then the priestly function of reconciliation may be realized.

Finally, we must think and act holistically – holistically in terms of the complex and multifaceted problem of poverty and holistically in offering the whole Gospel of the Kingdom as the solution. We must recognize that the social programs and social advocacy offered by the Church to day is incomplete without a proclamation of the gospel “in response to a question provoked by the activity of God in the community.”¹⁸¹

Further, this holistic approach must be viewed systemically. As pointed out in the precedent review of literature, there is little evidence to suggest that any of the existing programs and approaches to dealing with poverty involve anything but linear thinking

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 57-58.

¹⁸¹ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 67.

and traditional Western paradigms. Perhaps this thesis may be a starting point for attacking poverty through the portal of economic development systemically.

CHAPTER FOUR

A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In order to delve into the issue of increasing the wealth in the East Athens community the hexagon technique was used to systemically analyze the issue. The initial step in addressing the problem was to formulate two questions. The first was “How can the community encourage economic development?” The second was “What are the barriers to economic development?” To answer these questions two different groups were identified.

The Process

The first group consisted of the East Athens Development Corporation (EADC) board and staff of which I am a board member and co-chairman of the Economic Development Subcommittee. EADC was incorporated in 1993 as a 501(c)3 nonprofit Community Based Development Organization (CBDO) and Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) designated to carry out community economic development, affordable housing, and neighborhood revitalization programs primarily in East Athens defined by Census Tracts 301 and 302. The board and staff offered an opportunity to get the community involved since at least 51% of the board membership must be residents of the target area and the staff is actively involved in the area and therefore very knowledgeable of the community.

At one of its board meetings I presented the two questions. In attendance were the following:

5 board members - residents of the target area

2 board members – nonresidents including a regional director of the Georgia Department of Labor and a retired State Director of Minority Business Services

2 EADC staff members including the Director

Their responses were recorded. Due to time restraints, there was no development of any relationships between the variables.

In forming the second group an attempt was made to include the wider Athens-Clarke County community. Representatives from faith-based organizations, local businesses, county and state government, the University of Georgia as well as other interested parties were invited. Out of the twenty individuals invited, eight participated in the process. Of those who were invited but unable to attend, each expressed great interest and requested to be kept informed of the progress. At this meeting, the responses to the questions were recorded. The responses from the other meeting were then introduced and the process of grouping the variables into categories and determining causal relationships began.

First, though, a brief discussion about the somewhat unorthodox approach to hexagoning using two different groups may prove helpful. Admittedly it would have been ideal to have both groups meet together. The cross-pollination of ideas and the networking that would have occurred would have been beneficial. However, one of my aims was to get as diverse a group as possible. Early on scheduling loomed as major

barrier. Therefore knowing I would have a captive audience at the EADC board meeting and understanding that I would have to be flexible in convening the other group I opted for holding two separate meetings. As it turned out attendance at both meetings was less than I had hoped for. However the diversity objective was met with eleven African-Americans and seven Caucasians of whom seven were female and eleven were male with a wide range of socio-economic levels and educational attainment represented.

The other objective of involving a second group was to cultivate relationships with Christians to determine who had similar views regarding the means of advancing the Kingdom. Those who were so identified would then be given the opportunity to continue their involvement in the project in whatever capacity they felt called to.

The variables from the two groups are listed below in Exhibit I and Exhibit II. For reference purposes, the first twenty-six variables for both questions are from the EADC board meeting. The remaining variables for each question are from the second group.

Exhibit I - How Can the Community Encourage Economic Development? - 1

- 1 Providing with local labor market info
- 2 Input from local economic development agencies
- 3 Attending local government meetings on economic development
- 4 Becoming involved
- 5 Know what it takes
- 6 Inform community of what is going on
- 7 Pooling information
- 8 Bring project from outside community
- 9 Education of available resources
- 10 Providing more one stop centers(education, job training)
- 11 More financial resources
- 12 Encouraging participation in the community
- 13 Let people know their opinion is accepted
- 14 Letting people outside community know what is needed
- 15 Support business expo in community
- 16 Support from community church
- 17 More education knowledge
- 18 More support from local business owners
- 19 Taking advantage of opportunities
- 20 Encourage education and entrepreneurship

Exhibit I - How Can the Community Encourage Economic Development? - 1 (Cont)

- 21 Job creation expansion
- 22 Affordable housing
- 23 Business assessment/development
- 24 Supporting education and training for jobs
- 25 Funding support
- 26 Providing jobs
- 27 Hopeful vision
- 28 Identify leadership
- 29 Communicate benefits/threats to economic development
- 30 Identify and define problems
- 31 Define community - who it is
- 32 Educate people
- 33 Face to face interaction
- 34 Mass media explanation of economic development
- 35 Communicate personal benefit for each stakeholder
- 36 Ask community to decide economic development need
- 37 Create incentives
- 38 Create sense of community
- 39 Locate active community organizations
- 40 Create local businesses and jobs
- 41 What is in it for them
- 42 Develop funding for startup business

Exhibit I - How Can the Community Encourage Economic Development? - 1 (Cont)

- 43 Create a crisis
- 44 Ask community
- 45 History of economic development
- 46 Find successes and communicate
- 47 Community's perception to barriers
- 51 Church community as whole
- 52 Do your homework

Exhibit II - What Are the Barriers to Economic Development? - 1

- 1 Transportation
- 2 Job skills
- 3 Job opportunities
- 4 Education
- 5 Health conditions
- 6 Poor attitude/lack of motivation
- 7 Financial resources
- 8 Deviation from systematic/institutional expectation
- 9 Business cliques
- 10 Limited diversity
- 11 Digital divide
- 12 Crime
- 13 Skilled workforce
- 14 Financial literacy
- 15 Infrastructure
- 16 Private investment
- 17 Distracting individual issues - home, family, apathy
- 18 Not being able to think outside box
- 19 Poor planning and goal setting
- 20 People thinking their opinion doesn't matter
- 21 Low self-esteem

Exhibit II - What Are the Barriers to Economic Development? - 1 (Cont)

- 22 Not involved
- 23 Not expressing ideas to right people
- 24 Low interest
- 25 Lack of career goals
- 26 Unaware of value of economic development to community
- 27 No Trust
- 28 Poor education
- 29 No quick fix
- 30 Political power structure
- 31 Non-responsive large institutions
- 32 Myth of recession proof
- 33 Racial and class discrimination
- 34 Unwillingness of corporations to take risk
- 35 Low skilled workforce
- 36 Labor Supply
- 37 Resistance to change
- 38 Desire to keep wages low
- 39 Dominate culture in decision-making
- 40 Competing interest groups
- 41 Real opportunity
- 42 Gentrification
- 43 Low expectation

Exhibit II - What Are the Barriers to Economic Development? - 1 (Cont)

44 Definition of economic development

45 Communication

46 Land

47 Access to capital

48 Knowledge startup

49 Community leadership

50 Economic development path

51 Urban/suburban church

52 Uncohesive groups

53 Poor work ethic

At the meeting of the second group, its responses were merged with the EADC group and the process of categorization began with the variables from the first question.

Initially the variables were combined into the following categories:

- A – Educate, encourage and support in economic development
- B – Show me the money
- C – Develop broad coalition of support
- D – Determine outcomes with understanding of past
- E – Identify leadership
- F – Engage community at grass roots
- G – Create jobs
- H – Motivate through marketing
- I – Illustrate and define rewards
- J – Identify and define problem

Subsequently a team of four met on two additional occasions to continue the hexagoning process. With regards to the first question, a further refinement of the categories resulted in the following:

- A – Improve educational impact through delivery and content
- B – Create sense of community
- C – Create vision and instill hope
- D – Get community input on barriers, problems, outcomes
- E – Communicate benefits and risks
- F – Do your homework
- G – Create jobs

H – Show me the money – Prime the Long-term financial pump

I – Create and expand wealth in the community

The final categorization of variables to the first question resulted in the following:

A – Improve educational impact through delivery and content

B – Create sense of community

C – Create vision and instill hope

D – Get community input on needs, problems

E – Improve awareness

G – Create jobs

H – Prime the long-term financial pump - Show me the money

I – Create and expand wealth in the community

The categories with their corresponding variables are detailed in Exhibit III on the following pages.

Exhibit III - How Can the Community Encourage Economic Development? - 2

A Improve educational impact through delivery and content

- 1 Providing with local labor market info
- 2 Input from local economic development agencies
- 7 Pooling information
- 9 Education of available resources
- 10 Providing more one stop centers (education, job training)
- 17 More education, knowledge
- 20 Encourage education and entrepreneurship
- 24 Supporting education and training for jobs
- 32 Educate people

B Prime the LT financial pump - Show me the money

- 11 More financial resources
- 25 Funding support
- 37 Create incentives
- 42 Develop funding for startup business

C Create sense of community

- 4 Becoming involved
- 12 Encouraging participation in the community
- 13 Let people know their opinion is accepted

Exhibit III - How Can the Community Encourage Economic Development? - 2 (Cont)

- 15 Support business expo in community
- 16 Support from community church
- 18 More support from local business owners
- 31 Define community who it is
- 38 Create sense of community
- 51 Church community as whole
- 52 Do your homework

D Create vision and instill hope

- 5 Know what it takes
- 22 Affordable housing
- 27 Hopeful vision
- 29 Communicate benefits/threats to economic development
- 35 Communicate personal benefit for each stakeholder
- 41 What is in it for them
- 45 History of economic development
- 46 Find successes and communicate

E Get community input on needs, problems,

- 28 Identify leadership
- 30 Identify and define problems
- 33 Face to face interaction

Exhibit III - How Can the Community Encourage Economic Development? - 2 (Cont)

- 36 Ask community to decide economic development need
- 39 Locate active community organizations
- 44 Ask community
- 47 Community's perception to barriers

F Improve awareness

- 3 Attending local government meetings on economic development
- 6 Inform community of what is going on
- 14 Letting people outside community know what is needed
- 34 Mass media explanation of economic development
- 43 Create a crisis

G Create jobs

- 8 Bring project from outside community
- 19 Taking advantage of opportunities
- 21 Job creation expansion
- 23 Business assessment/development
- 26 Providing jobs
- 40 Create local businesses and jobs

I Create and expand wealth in the community

On the other side of the ledger, the hexagoning work on the barrier question was somewhat easier to bring to finality. The initial attempt at categorization of variables provided the following list:

- L – Ineffective community leadership
- M – Underutilized and incorrectly allocated resources
- N – Competing interest groups
- O – Low quality of life
- P – Basic educational deficiency
- Q – Need for funding
- R – Counterproductive mindset
- S – Need to improve infrastructure
- T – Lack of jobs
- U – Unrecognized and uncommunicated opportunity
- V – Poorly prepared workforce

The next iteration resulted in the following:

- L – Ineffective community leadership
- N – Competing interest groups
- Q – Investing for short term
- R – Thinking counterproductively
- U – Unrecognized and uncommunicated opportunity
- V – Poorly prepared workforce

One final change was made. In writing up the story, **(L) – Ineffective community leadership** was merged with **(N) Competing interest groups** resulting in:

N – Competing interest groups

Q – Investing for short term

R – Thinking counterproductively

U – Unrecognized and uncommunicated opportunity

V – Poorly prepared workforce

The barrier categories with their corresponding variables are detailed in Exhibit IV on the following pages.

Exhibit IV - What Are the Barriers to Economic Development? - 2

N Competing interest groups

- 9 Business cliques
- 10 Limited diversity
- 30 Political power structure
- 31 Non-responsive large institutions
- 33 Racial and class discrimination
- 38 Desire to keep wages low
- 39 Dominate culture in decision-making
- 40 Competing interest groups
- 49 Community leadership
- 51 Urban/suburban church
- 52 Uncohesive groups

Q Investing for short term

- 1 Transportation
- 7 Financial resources
- 15 Infrastructure
- 16 Private investment
- 42 Gentrification
- 46 Land
- 47 Access to capital

Exhibit IV - What Are the Barriers to Economic Development? - 2 (Cont)

R Thinking counterproductively

- 6 Poor attitude/lack of motivation
- 8 Deviation from systematic/institutional expectation
- 12 Crime
- 17 Distracting individual issues - home, family, apathy
- 18 Not being able to think outside box
- 19 Poor planning and goal setting
- 20 People thinking their opinion doesn't matter
- 21 Low self-esteem
- 22 Not involved
- 23 Not expressing ideas to right people
- 24 Low interest
- 25 Lack of career goals
- 27 Not trusting
- 29 No quick fix
- 37 Resistance to change
- 43 Low expectation
- 44 Unclear definition of economic development
- 53 Poor work ethic

U Unrecognized and uncommunicated opportunity

- 3 Job opportunities
- 26 Unaware of value of economic development to community

Exhibit IV - What Are the Barriers to Economic Development? – 2 (Cont)

- 32 Myth of recession proof
- 34 Unwillingness of corporations to take risk
- 41 Real opportunity
- 44 Definition of economic development
- 45 Communication
- 50 Economic development path

V Poorly prepared workforce

- 2 Job skills
- 4 Education
- 5 Health conditions
- 11 Digital divide
- 13 Skilled workforce
- 14 Financial literacy
- 28 Poor education
- 35 Low skilled workforce
- 36 Labor Supply
- 48 Knowledge startup

The next step was to create a causal loop diagram depicting the interrelationships between the categories for each question and then combine the two to provide a complete picture. These loops are presented on the following pages.

Exhibit V - Engaging the Community in Economic Development



Exhibit VI - Barriers to Economic Development

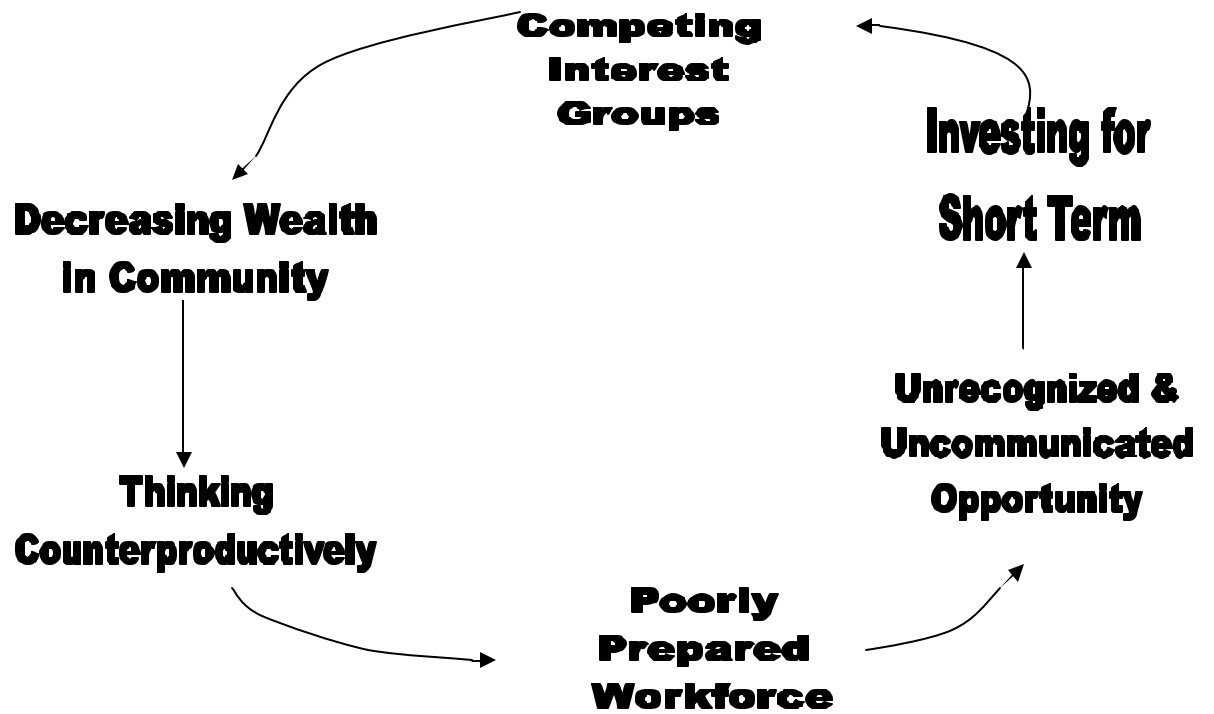
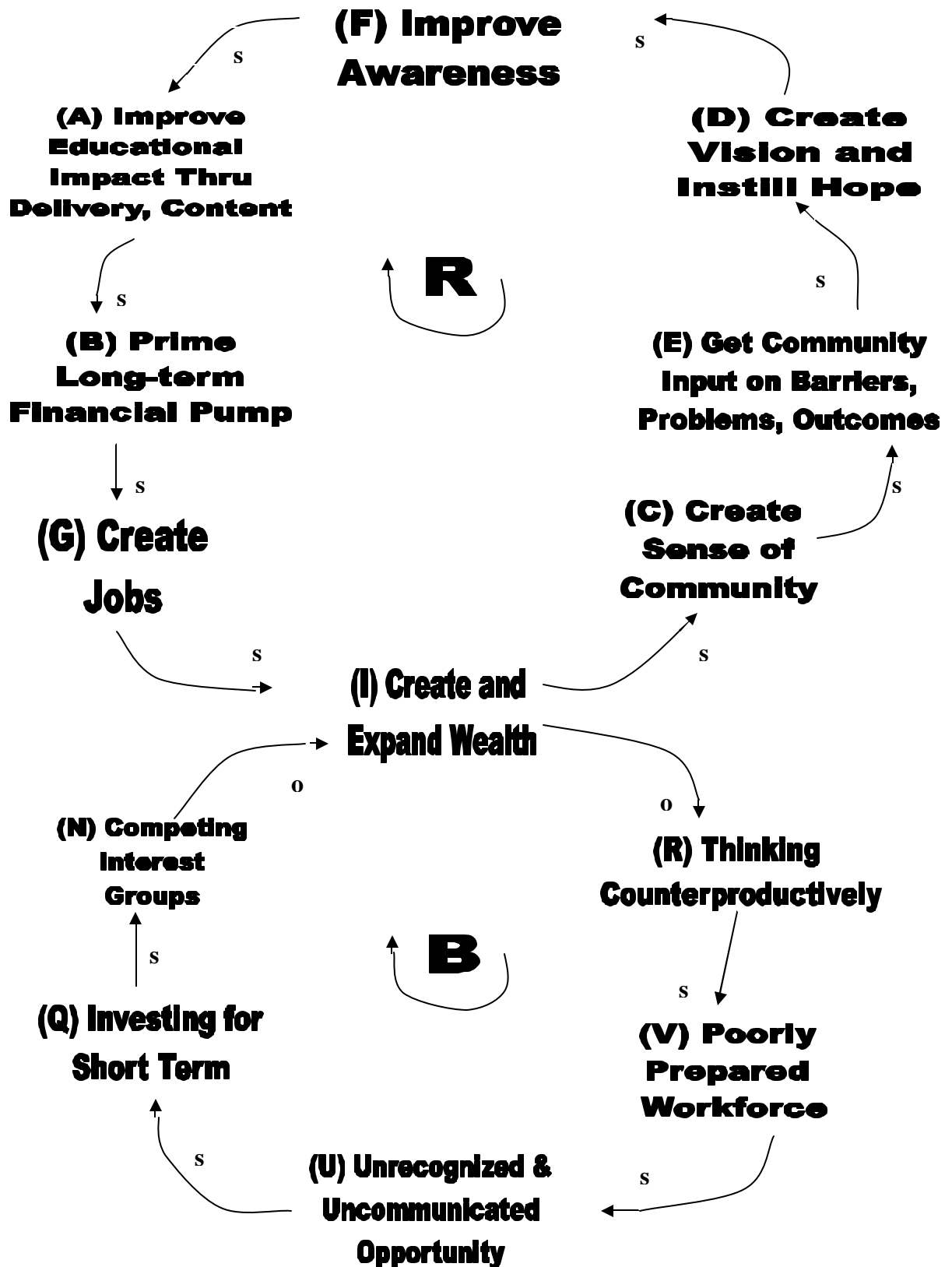


Exhibit VII - Engaging the Community in Economic Development



Based on the causal loop diagram on the previous page, the cycle to **create and expand wealth (I)** in a community begins with **creating a sense of community (C)** by encouraging participation in the community from all the stakeholders including local business owners and the local churches and by then letting those involved know that their opinion is accepted. To initiate this sense of community it first is necessary to **get community input on the needs and problems (E)** by identifying and working with local informal leaders, active organizations in the community and then involving the community in face-to-face meetings. This then leads to **creating vision and instilling hope (D)** by communicating past successes and stressing what each stakeholder has to gain. Once the vision has been established, the next step is to **improve awareness (F)** of both those within the local community as well as those who are a part of the larger community.

Along with the community involvement and the resulting vision for economic development, it necessary to **improve the educational impact through delivery and content (A)**. Although currently there are attempts to provide educational assistance, often the community has limited knowledge of the availability of these resources. Also the content of the training needs to be more tailored to the characteristics of the community labor pool. This will be a major step in **priming the long-term financial pump (B)** as additional funding sources will be identified, perhaps through the use of incentives.

This will lead to **creating jobs (G)** either through bringing projects from outside of the community, by expansion of existing opportunities, or through the creation of jobs by those who heretofore had not been entrepreneurs.

As jobs are created, the wealth of the community expands which then leads to a greater sense of community and the cycle continues.

At the same time there are clearly barriers to economic development. One that is pervasive is **thinking counterproductively (R)**, whether it is lack of planning, low self-esteem, resistance to change or any one of a multitude of similar thoughts that act as constraints in pursuing economic development. This then leads to a **poorly prepared workforce (V)**, which is evident in such factors as low levels of educational obtainment, underdeveloped job skills, poor understanding of how to start a business, as well as financial illiteracy. What follows is **unrecognized and uncommunicated opportunity (U)** including missed job opportunities for the local workforce as well as the unwillingness of outside businesses to take a perceived higher level of risk. The result is **investing in the existing community with a short-term horizon (Q)**. Needed components of economic development such as the provision of financial resources from both the private and public sector go elsewhere. Because of the perception of the community being high risk and the concomitant redirection of capital, the groups that have an interest in the community end up **competing among themselves (N)**. What results is a political driven power structure and racial and class discrimination - in effect a divided community.

This has a detrimental effect on the creation and expansion of wealth in the community; thereby perpetuating the counterproductive thinking and the cycle continues.

Analysis of the System

The major element of counter-productivity in the system is the mindset that is prevalent in the community. Many of the statistics cited in Chapter 1, such as the high

crime rate, the high unemployment rate and the low graduation rate as well as the drug and alcohol addiction that is prevalent clearly substantiate that one of the major hindrances to economic development is the pessimistic thinking of the community. More responses to the question on barriers to economic development fell into this category than any other. Noteworthy were some of the responses from the residents of the community. One was that people in the community do not think their opinion matters. In general the perception was one that to a certain degree the community lacked hope and vision, both because of “system” failures as well as issues directly related to the individuals.

Without this vision and hope, there is little motivation to pursue education and acquire job skills. This then leads to not only a high unemployment rate but underemployment as well. And what follows is little interest in seeking out employment opportunities.

The other major point of counter-productivity that surfaced is the short-term investing strategy that is present. The primary thrust of this element relates to the perception of those not living in the community, although the point addressed above would suggest that it affects the community as well. A short-term investment philosophy precludes the development of many of the necessary elements that have to be present in a community for economic growth. If local government adheres to this shortsightedness, the needed infrastructure in terms of those services that local government provides will go wanting. Access to capital, whether it is government assistance in the form of guarantees or investment by the private sector, then becomes a barrier to economic development. The long range costs to the community as a whole in terms of having to provide increased police protection, greater health costs, increased jail capacity and lower

tax base are exacerbated. Rather than investing in economic development with a long-term view in the community, the short-term alternative is taken, i.e., to do little or nothing in terms of investment.

Because of this limited supply of capital, organizations in the community must compete. And if there is ineffective leadership in the community in general and in these organizations specifically, the community is unable to speak with one voice. What results is a conglomeration of special interests and in some cases the abdication of decision-making to the dominant culture and a perpetuation of racial and class discrimination.

In summary the two major elements of counter-productivity are inappropriate thinking and a short-term investment philosophy. These two areas offer the greatest potential places of leverage to change the system. Although they offer the greatest potential, they will also be the hardest to accomplish. Lest we be guilty of the same ills, i.e., bad thinking and short-term investment philosophy, we would be disingenuous not to try to affect these elements. It can be done but only in the long-term.

In the past the efforts expended on economic development have primarily focused in two areas. The first has been in the workforce preparation area involving job training, job fairs, and even micro-business workshops promoting the startup of businesses. The second is in the recruitment of companies to relocate to specific geographical areas in order to create jobs. It is true that both of these are in the reinforcement loop, **Improve educational impact thru delivery, content (A)** and **Create jobs (G)**. To an unbiased observer neither of these methods has been completely successful, particularly in

geographical areas that have been designated low to moderate income. This appears to be true for several reasons.

In terms of workforce preparation the main reason that this has met with limited success is that the primary hindrance, **Thinking counter-productively (R)**, has not been factored into the process. Although attempts are beginning to be made to address the soft skills such as work habits, dress, etc., even this approach does not address the root of the problem. In pastoral terms, we refer to this as behavior modification – changes that are temporary because the heart issues have not been dealt with. In other words, there has been no redemptive element introduced. The mind that created the shortcomings in the first place is still unrenewed. In order for lasting change to occur and the concomitant overcoming of “stinkin’ thinkin’,” the operative mindset must be renewed and some degree of inner healing must take place.

With the many issues that continually surface in the separation of church and state battle, government run programs and their inability to address root causes and problems, are not the solution. Hence the Church must become involved. Heretofore few local church bodies have taken an active interest in economic development. Whether this has been because of the Gnostic idea of the spiritual being good and the materialistic being evil or because the Church has been ill-equipped to enter the fray, this avoidance must change in order for a real and lasting impact to occur.

The effort to bring business into the local community particularly in low to moderate income areas, has similarly been ineffective because two other hindrances – **Investing for the short term (Q)** and a **Poorly prepared workforce (V)** – have not been adequately addressed. As outside businesses look to relocate, profit and an

available labor supply are factored into their decision. Although it is unrealistic to advocate that profit cease to be a factor, it does become incumbent for local government to provide incentives to encourage the process. Likewise local government must step up to the plate when it comes to providing the infrastructure necessary for businesses to operate efficiently and profitably.

Thus for economic development and the concomitant creation and expansion of wealth to take place, these major hindrances must be at least mitigated, if not removed. As described above this takes responsiveness initially, from two institutions, the Church and local government. Clearly the private sector must also be involved as it is the engine that will drive the growth.

To begin to institute the changes that will assist the community in engaging in economic development several aspects can be addressed. As indicated in the reinforcing loop, the sense of community must be reinforced. Some conditions already exist that will facilitate this process. First, East Athens Development Corporation, referenced previously, has essentially been charged with this responsibility and is actively engaged in promoting community awareness. In addition, there are several other organizations that are active in the community, including a homeowner's association, a local business council and a human advisory board.

Being a board member of EADC and co-chairman of the Economic Development Subcommittee, I have access into the community and will promote the role of EADC to continue developing this sense of community. With EADC cooperation, I will begin to identify and then bring together the leaders of the community to **Get their input on barriers, problems and desired outcomes (E)**. Working with these leaders and the

community as a whole we will **Create vision and instill hope (C)** regarding economic development and work to **Improve the awareness (F)** of the efforts involved. In conjunction with EADC and its partnerships, the **Delivery and content of educational programs (A)** will continue to be utilized. This will then hopefully **Prime the long-term financial pump (B)** and lead to **Creation of jobs (G)** and ultimately the **Creation and expansion of wealth (I)** in the community.

Thus working with these established relationships will result in a reinforcing series of events leading to the desired end. However, at the same time the hindrances must be addressed; for any changes achieved on the reinforcing side will be abated if they are not addressed. To do this, the first step that must be tackled is to change the mindset of the community in those areas that work against economic development. My goal is to develop relationships with those in the community that are interested in improving by using the “pond theory.” Essentially this theory says that all members of the community are in a large pond. Realistically not all are interested in pursuing anything more than where they currently are. However, there is a certain group that does seek a higher degree of wellness. These are identified, moved to a smaller pond and then worked with. Some will attain a certain level of change and not want to go any further. But again, some will want to continue their upward path. These will be identified and assisted in going to the next pond. The process continues as long as the desire is there.

I have been laying the groundwork already for such a plan. In their efforts to create a sense of community and vision, EADC and the Athens Housing Authority (AHA) have as a stated goal increasing homeownership in the community. To achieve this they both have capital available to provide affordable houses. In conjunction with a

for profit company that is operated on biblical principles, the local workforce will be employed to build and rehab EADC and AHA projects. Initially EADC has committed to establishing a taskforce to identify a labor pool from the community. This labor pool will consist of those in the construction industry who are skilled and those who are not. For those who are skilled, the objective while developing relationships will be to encourage them to become licensed. For those unskilled, the goal will be to begin to give them some minimal skills. This is at one level.

At another, and more important, from the main hindrance standpoint, we will begin to minister to them in the area of renewing their mind. As one of the local pastors says, "All ministry flows out of relationship." The plan is also to work with local pastors to do some training on God's perspective on work. With the local churches working together, the sense of community will be encouraged with hopefully, a concurrent reduction in competition.

The other area that will need to be addressed is changing the short-term investment strategies that are followed. Again working with EADC, a more unified voice with the local government needs to be developed and, together with the input from the community on the barriers and problems, begin to lay a case for community reinvestment as a way to save money in the long run. When I was soliciting participation in the hexagoning process several elected officials were invited. Although none actually participated, each one was very interested in the results.

A further example of the apparent interest by the local government occurred simultaneously with this project. Athens-Clarke County has several boards and authorities for which citizens can volunteer. One is the Athens-Clarke County Industrial

(Economic) Development Authority, for which I applied. And although I was not selected, during the interviewing process I was able to share a general synopsis of this project with the Mayor and Commissioners, who were all very complementary. In fact in the denial letter, the Mayor attached a personal note stating that she wanted to get me involved in economic development. So, the groundwork is being laid.

Bringing the private sector to the table may be equally challenging. But, by using an assessment of the services needed based on input from the community and a heightened interest from the public sector, investment opportunities may become more viable. Together, the public and private sectors will hopefully provide a basis for bringing resources to the community.

The introduction of these changes into the community will not be without opposition. The East Athens community has perceived itself as an unwanted stepchild. This can be traced to both its historical interaction with local government and local real estate builders.

Over the last decade the community has felt that the local government has not kept its promises, particularly as it relates to the projects located in East Athens that were to be funded by the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax. Recently there appears to be some very positive movement due to the building of following:

- Police substation.
- East Athens Dance Center
- East Athens Community Park

The same, however, cannot be said for local developers. In the last year developers have bought available lots and built “affordable houses.” Generally the price

has been much higher than the average for the area resulting in gentrification and higher property taxes. Through the construction company mentioned above that will be using the local labor supply, it is anticipated that this trend will be reversed by building houses that fit in to the community, from both an aesthetic as well as a price perspective.

The approach with the greatest potential of mitigating this resistance will be through improving the sense of community and communicating with the community the benefits that will accrue with economic development. As can be seen much has happened, and is happening, to assist in this change. But again as stated above, we must have a long-term perspective. Change in the magnitude being discussed will not occur overnight and in fact may at times appear to be unattainable.

But, as the highly successful defensive coach for the University of Georgia Bulldogs says, “Finish the drill.” Knowing that people’s lives can change will be the motivation to stay the course. In combating these social evils, we will be addressing the “city as the abode for personal and systemic evil.”¹⁸² In short by serving the poor of the East Athens community and the greater Athens-Clarke County, it will pursue the embodiment of the Kingdom of God, which Linthicum describes as follows:

God would seek to do this in every city by creating in that city a new community: the church. That community would be the very embodiment of God’s kingdom in the city. In its life together, the church would practice that new social order. Through its witness, the church would call the city to participate in God’s kingdom. By its solidarity with the economically, politically, and spiritually poor of the city, and by its confrontation of the powers that would seek to control and oppress rather than recognize their own poverty, the church would work for God’s kingdom. That is why Marchant insists that the underlying question to every church in every city is

¹⁸² Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 40.

this: How far has the kingdom of God become embodied and made real in the life, witness, and social action of your church in this city?¹⁸³

Economic development provides a pathway for pursuing this transformation of our cities. I believe that this pursuit is what God has called me to do. Hopefully this plan will begin the city transformation so many have prayed for so that our cities which God so dearly loves will become His tabernacle and a place that bears His name.

The analysis of this project is having a profound effect on my plan of action. The primary reason for pursuing this doctorate was to obtain some way of tackling the myriad of problems facing our city. Although I understood quite clearly the implications of the answer to the question “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time,” I had no idea where to take the first bite. Economic development and the use of hexagoning have provided a tangible way to begin the process. I am admittedly no expert in the process, but the insights particularly as they related to the two major hindrances detailed above, counterproductive mindset and short-term investment philosophy and the need to involve the community have proved beneficial. The recognition of the important role that the community plays is ironic since one of the themes that I preach on most is the necessity of relationships and community.

Reflection on the Process

This thesis begins with the quote from Dickens, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of time...” to describe the city in which I live. The same dichotomy exists as far as my personal experience with the process.

¹⁸³ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 105.

In designing the project, the most difficult problem was limiting the scope. Through discussions and several iterations with my mentors, a clearly defined project evolved with two succinct questions.

As stated above the hexagoning technique is an incredible tool for addressing the complexities of the city. This brought both the most fruit and the greatest frustration. One of the difficulties I encountered was gathering the participants.

With the EADC board I had originally requested time to work on the questions at a board retreat. As the time approached I was informed that I could have fifteen minutes. Needless to say fifteen minutes is barely enough time to write the questions down and explain the process. I was then put on the agenda at the next regularly scheduled board meeting. This meeting was also somewhat frustrating because of the time constraints which only allowed me to solicit answers to the questions and no real interaction with causality. However because of the diversity of the board, the responses themselves proved to be extremely beneficial.

Similar problems were encountered when I tried to establish a broader group of interested people. In total I invited directly at least twenty participants and although all expressed great interest, the final tally of those who actually met was nine including myself.

Another obstacle I encountered was the unfamiliarity with the process experienced by the participants. In class we all had been through sessions dedicated to systemic thinking and hexagoning, so when it came time to do our project there was a high level of understanding of both what we were trying to accomplish and how to accomplish it. This was not so with this project. Given my limited time in both

scenarios, I really did not explain much about the process including the expected outcomes.

And finally, my own lack of experience in leading a group in the process was a possible impediment. At times the process seemed to languish. With more experience and perhaps even more training, I might have been able to keep the process energized. Also I did not provide much explanation on the questions themselves. The question of the definition of “economic development” arose and I chose not to define it for the group. In retrospect it may have been better to commence the meetings with a discussion of what the term meant. “Doing” truth is always much more difficult than talking or even learning truth.

Although the level of participation was not what I had hoped for in terms of the numbers, I was pleased with the final result. The diversity of the answers and the opportunity to analyze the causality of those answers was a very positive experience. Since my leadership style tends to be participative in nature, the working with others was not a problem. To the contrary I wanted more critical analysis of the final deliverables.

The final assessment is that this has been exactly what I have needed to begin to tackle the problems of the city in a systemic way. Although I knew that systemic thinking was the answer, I had no idea how to implement it. This project, from the design to the analysis, has helped clarify my direction. I am beginning to understand how several of my other goals fit in. Heretofore, I felt like I was performing a juggling act with related but disconnected objects. But now I am beginning to see how they are all integrated into my overall life goal of building a biblically based economy.

The hexagoning technique will be equally valuable as I pursue the other related goals that I have - one of which is providing technical assistance to ministries and other non-profit organizations. The issues with these “front-line” ministries and non-profits is that they know how to deliver their own particular service, but know little about surviving long-term, accessing funding, assessing the effectiveness of their efforts, operating and reporting fiscally responsibly or understanding that these efforts may actually be counter-productive. Similarly cooperation among these organizations is virtually non-existent. Thus they lack a systemic perspective. So I can see how hexagoning and systemic thinking can be used to identify and coordinate non-profits working with the targeted population. In fact I have already been invited to assist in the planning of a start up ministry.

This project will also help me in my goal related to education. One of the issues in the Body of Christ is the lack of understanding of God’s perspective on work. It runs the gamut from at its simplest, not understanding that work is holy, to not understanding how the various business disciplines – accounting, economics, finance, management – interact, to how these disciplines have biblical foundations. Therefore it will be necessary to develop a comprehensive college level curriculum that covers these principles. The experience of actually developing the economy (doing the truth) and the creation of this curriculum (knowing the truth) will work toward the long-term success of building a biblically based economy.

PART III: CONFRONTATION

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES OF ENGAGING THE EAST ATHENS COMMUNITY IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Athens-Clarke County is a study of contrasts. Affluent and highly educated on the one hand, and on the other, the fifth poorest county with a population greater than 100,000 in the nation and a high school graduation rate hovering in the mid 50's. It is in this venue that this thesis originated. The disparity became the catalyst to explore new approaches to the issue of solving persistent poverty and its effects.

A review of the precedent literature including existing models overwhelmingly demonstrated that few understand the complexity of poverty. The linear thinking exemplified in the various models substantiated the simplistic and singularly focused solutions commonly proposed. Except when addressed by some of the writers, those with a Christian perspective, the underlying root cause of poverty – sin – was ignored.

The fact that the solution to overcoming poverty is a spiritual issue clearly has a strong biblical basis. The admonition and modeling of doing justice is a recurrent theme throughout the Old and New Testaments. Who better then to be actively involved in the process than the Church – a body of believers that thinks and acts holistically through a systemic approach, ministering to the spirit, soul, and body.

The application of this systemic approach became the focal point of this thesis. The crux of the project was to introduce economic development as the framework for increasing the wealth of the community.

What then are the outcomes of this project? The evaluation will address both the form and the substance of the project as well as areas for future research.

The structure of the project did seem to work quite well. The use of hexagoning, in particular, proved to be an excellent tool to understand the complexities of engaging a community in economic development. It has shown to be an effective way to translate systemic thinking as an abstract concept into a practical plan of action.

One facet of the process, though, developing an effective learning team, remains a challenge. As I continue to be involved in EADC, the ability to interact and pursue discussions related to economic development is certainly available. Another area that may ultimately evolve into a more effective learning team is the relationship I have established with the Athens Housing Authority (AHA). AHA is the overseer for public housing in ACC, which includes a 175-unit complex located in East Athens. However, what seems to be developing is a much less structured team. My relationships with several organizations actively involved in either the community or in the pursuit of addressing the poverty issue have created informal learning teams. The key individuals associated with each entity have endorsed the fundamental conclusions of this project and are committed to the concept of the necessity of economic development. Whether or not these relationships will serve the purpose as presently configured or will need to be consolidated into a more formalized learning team remains to be seen.

In terms of pertinent outcomes two items became apparent. The first is the need to get the community involved in the process. Whether it is the issue of poverty or any of the myriad of other challenges facing East Athens, the requirement for the solutions to come from those affected is paramount. Jay Forrester in his *Urban Dynamics* states this quite clearly: “Probably no active, externally program is superior to a system modification that changes internal incentives and leaves the burden of system improvement to internal processes.”¹⁸⁴ There are many examples of outside entities enacting, or at least proposing, solutions that have largely ignored the recipients of those solutions. The result is that unacceptable levels of poverty remain. One of the local efforts that have risen concurrently with this thesis has been the Partners for a Prosperous Athens. This initiative, which was described in Chapter 1, has entered the recommendation stage of its process. Although the emphasis has been on a bottom-up approach to the issue of eliminating persistent poverty, those representing the twenty-eight percent living in poverty and the sixty-five percent of those who are underemployed have not been involved in the process in any substantive way. Their involvement has been limited to providing information related to their situations – not solutions to their problems. This has been particularly frustrating since I have been an active participant in the initiative, including sharing with the chairman the early findings of this thesis.

The other major finding is that the local body of believers has to become more involved if long-term solutions are to be successfully implemented. As identified in Chapter 4, counter productive thinking is the major impediment to raising the wealth of the community. Up to this point, its involvement has been limited to meeting the

¹⁸⁴ Jay W. Forrester, *Urban Dynamics* (Portland, Oregon: Productivity Press, 1969), 111.

physical needs through soup kitchens and clothes closets and to providing some limited degree of workforce training. This has been no where more apparent than in a ministerial steering committee set up in close relationship to Partners for a Prosperous Athens. At one of its initial meetings, the following question was raised: “What can the faith-based community bring to the table that no other organization can?” The responses avoided any reference to a spiritual component.

The initial assumption in this thesis is that the root cause of social-economic problems is sin. I do not believe, though, that I have adequately addressed “how” the various problems have been created. Forrester writes: “A properly conceived system study aimed at the improvement of a complex system should start by developing a clear understanding of how and why the difficulties have been created.”¹⁸⁵ Although Chapter 3 provides the evidence, it does not address how the present situation, a twenty-eight percent poverty rate, was created.

Therefore I see this as a need for greater study and understanding. For that reason this pilot project may be addressing a second tier solution, the first tier being the root cause. However the approach delineated in this project may be an entry way into rectifying the underlying cause. Forrester says: “The internal forces in most social systems are so powerful that they will likely dominate any effort to treat symptoms, if treatment does not reach the true structural causes.”¹⁸⁶ Counter productive thinking, being the key leverage point identified in Chapter 4, may actually be the “true structural

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 120.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 120.

cause.” Scripture seems to verify this: “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Prov 23:7).

This is the place the Church must be engaged. Further study needs to be done to address what workable solutions are available to get this accomplished.

As is probably true in any study, more questions seem to be raised than answered. Another opportunity for further research closely connected to the project is to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of using economic development as the key entry point for increasing the wealth community. Attacking the social and economic problems plaguing a community through economic development potentially opens the door for meeting other basic needs as well. The challenge will be to identify how this fits into the overall community system. To not do so, would run contra to the essence of this project, the systemic model.

In the course of conducting the research for this project, several additional questions arose. The first expands on the role of the Church: “In these times how does the Church exercise its prophetic voice?” We certainly hear enough regarding eschatology, but where is the Church in providing wisdom from its unique perspective as an agent of the Creator in matters of politics and business, in addition to providing the moral conscience for our nation. In King Solomon’s days, Scripture says that he was sought out for his wisdom. How does the Church regain that position?

Another area for study relates to defining a biblically based economic system. As alluded to previously, the Western world has accepted capitalism as the de facto standard and there is no lack of Christian pundits embracing it. But is a system that is, as I perceive, motivated by greed, consistent with the principles of Kingdom of God?

The transportability of this project is another subject that needs further examination. This involves such components as:

- How can this be used in other communities? Other ministries?
- Does this model work in underdeveloped locales as well?

What are the next steps? This thesis-project has laid the foundation for “eating the elephant one bite at a time.” Although the wheels of change turn slowly, the course seems to have been established. In the immediate future, continuing to build relationships in the community needs to be a high priority. This is especially true concerning relationships with ministers in the East Athens area as ways are sought to change the existing mindsets. Another path to pursue is to work with the organizations that already have a presence in the area, particularly East Athens Development Corporation and the Athens Housing Authority and to cultivate the learning teams that have emerged. The third priority is to involve the community in the establishment of new businesses in the area and the growth of existing ones.

In conclusion, an integrated, holistic, systemic approach to solving the socio-economic problems so prevalent in our society and especially in our urban areas is clearly needed. But, for this transformation to occur, it is ultimately people that must change whether viewed from the perspective of individuals or the urban systems. For lasting change to happen, the spiritual aspect must be addressed by the Church. In the end it is the body of believers, called to work as agents of God by the leading of the Holy Spirit, that will bring this about.

I believe God has called me to build His Kingdom through a biblically based economy that incorporates systemic thinking into the revelation of God’s perspective on

work and business. For me this is not simply a project but the very core of who I am and what I am about.

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